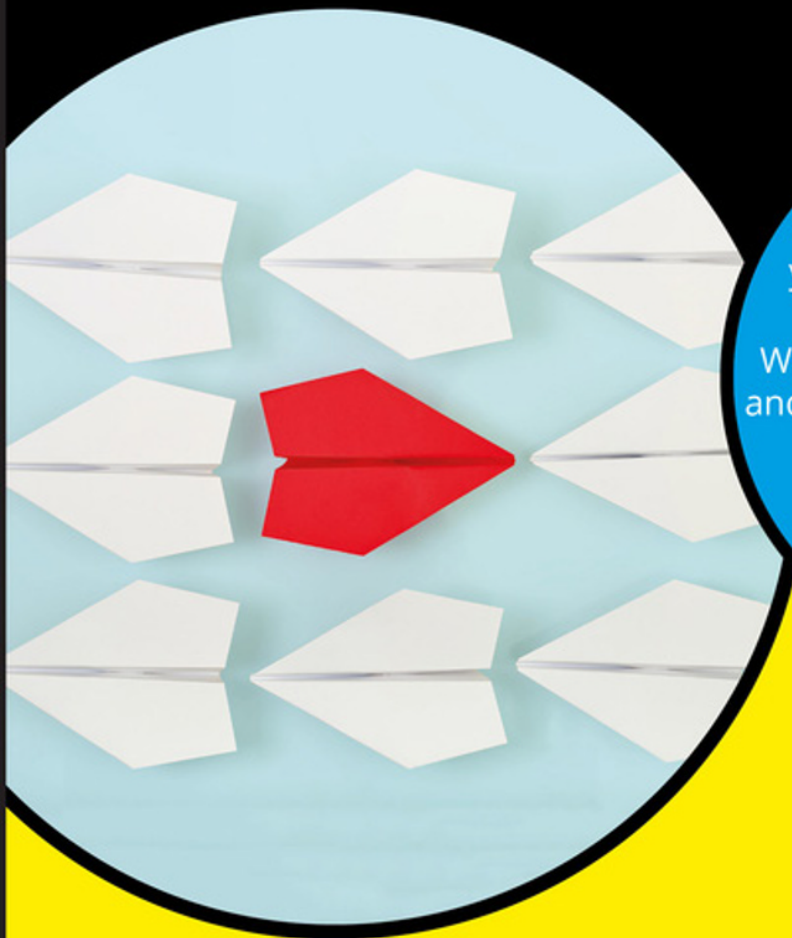


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Getting Your First Job

for
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Determine what kind of job
you want and are suited for

Write a compelling cover letter
and résumé to land an interview

Prepare for interviews
and evaluate job offers

Roberto Angulo

Cofounder of AfterCollege.com



Getting Your First Job

by Roberto Angulo
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Getting Your First Job For Dummies®

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Introduction

Whether you're a high school student looking for part-time work, a college student looking for your first internship, or a recent grad out in the world looking for your first full-time job, you're taking an important step forward in your life!

Getting a job is not rocket science, but it's also not something to be taken lightly. Part of the process involves figuring out what you want to do and what job will make you happy. The next part is actually identifying the right jobs that are available and applying to them. You also need to prepare your résumé and think about what you want to show employers. After you apply, you want to make sure your application is accepted and that you pass your interviews. And when you get an offer, you need to determine if it's a good package for you.

Finding a job may seem complicated, but my goal in this book is to outline all the steps involved, and help you get through them easily and successfully. Even if you read only part of this book and follow only some of the steps, you'll be better off than most job seekers.

Millions of people have gotten jobs before you. Some have prepared for the task and others haven't. Eventually, people tend to find their way and get on a career path that allows them to succeed. Most likely, you'll change jobs a few times throughout your career and you may also figure out you need to go on a different career path altogether.

Your first job is the beginning of a journey. With this book, you get a good start and you'll be armed with the knowledge, tools, and best practices that will help you as you progress along your career path.

About This Book

Finding your first job may seem like a daunting task, but with this book, it won't be. Here I provide a comprehensive overview of the various steps involved in finding out what job you'll like, going after that job, and getting the job. This book provides practical tips you can use and doesn't go into philosophical discussions or technical jargon. The knowledge in this book is a combination of common sense and advice that has helped job seekers over the years.

Each part of the book addresses a facet of the search, and each chapter and section addresses a specific step you can take to make your search a lot easier. You can jump from one section of the book to another, in any order, depending on where you are in your search.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

Everyone's circumstances are unique; however, I've seen some patterns over the years on how people look for work and where they need help. I made the following assumptions about you as I wrote this book:

- » **You have some college experience.** A few chapters, not all, make reference to college activities, internships, and resources. This applies if you went to vocational school, community college, a four-year university, or graduate school. Even if you didn't go to college, the content in this book is pertinent and will help you get your first job.
- » **You're tight on time.** Looking for your first job is hard enough, and you shouldn't have to read a novel to figure out how to do it right. This book gives you advice in small digestible pieces that you can easily access.
- » **You have a computer and Internet access.** Most of the steps outlined in this book rely on your leveraging online tools to achieve what you need to do. Whether it's searching for jobs, researching employers, or doing an online assessment, you need fast Internet access. You can do a lot of the things outlined here on your phone, but it's better if you sit down in front of your computer, calmly and with a big enough screen, to do things such as write a cover letter and submit your job applications. Go to your public library to use a computer if you don't have one at home.
- » **You're on social media.** It's rare to find individuals who are not on social media, and only a few stay away from it. Your social media presence impacts how employers perceive you and helps you connect with others. Some of the chapters in this book reference sites like Facebook and Twitter, and I assume you have an account on at least one of these.

Icons Used in This Book

I use the following icons throughout this book to highlight important information that allows you to make the most out of the advice provided:



TIP

The Tip icon points out pertinent insights and shortcuts to other parts of the book that make getting your first job even easier.



REMEMBER

I use the Remember icon to flag information that's so useful you'll want to commit it to memory.



WARNING

I use the Warning icon to draw your attention to things that could save you a lot of time and trouble.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When I share information that's interesting but not essential to your understanding of the subject at hand, I mark it with the Technical Stuff icon. You can skip anything marked with this icon without missing the main point.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the content in this book, you also get access to a free online Cheat Sheet filled with more pointers on how to get your first job. The Cheat Sheet includes advice such as how to evaluate your first job offer and how to keep track of your applications. To access this resource go to www.dummies.com and enter **Getting Your First Job For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the search box.

Where to Go from Here

Depending on where you are in the job search process, you can use the Table of Contents and Index to easily locate the section that will solve your need.

You don't have to read this book in order from beginning to end — you can jump to any section that interests you! If you're not sure where to begin, I recommend

you start with Chapter 1 to help you get organized prior to starting your search. If you're not sure what you want to do or what kind of job you want, Chapter 3 is a huge help. And because this book is about getting your first job, you should also make sure to read Chapter 6, which goes into the technical details of how to do an effective job search.

Finally, no matter where you are in your job search, check out Chapters 10 and 11 to get tips on how to do well in your interviews. Most job seekers consider interviewing to be one of the hardest parts of the process. Read these chapters to gain confidence!

I was in your shoes once, trying to figure out what I wanted to do and how to get started. But you're farther ahead because you're reading this book! You've got this. Now, onward and upward!

1

Preparing Yourself Before the Job Search

IN THIS PART . . .

Set objectives and use the right tools as you embark on finding your first job.

Take an inventory of your skills and abilities so you can highlight them on your résumé and in your interactions with employers.

Learn more about yourself and get a better idea of what you might like to do by using online assessment tools.

Discover different career paths by talking to others about their work and researching occupations.

- » Setting expectations for your search
- » Creating a road map for finding your first job
- » Using tools that will keep you organized

Chapter **1**

Mapping Out Your Job Search Strategy

What kind of job are you looking for and what do you want to get out of it?

Your answers to these questions determine how long it will take you to find your first job. They also establish what you'll need to do to get the job. For example, if your goal is to get part-time work, of any kind so you can earn some money, then you don't need to do a lot of research. For the most part, it's about going to places like Starbucks and Applebee's to fill out applications. It may take you a few days or a few weeks to get a part-time job.

On the other hand, if you have a plan in mind, where you want a highly coveted job after college and you know you'll have competition, then you have to start thinking about the internships you need to have in order to improve your chances of getting that job. It may take you up to three months, and sometimes even a year and a half to land the job you like, depending on whether you have relevant experience.

Even entry-level jobs sometimes require experience. This is a Catch-22. You're looking for your first job, but you need previous experience. Internships are a perfect way to gain this experience!

This chapter talks about the various types of first jobs you can have. You also get an overview of tools to use to stay organized.

Getting Your First Part-Time Job

Your first job will most likely be a part-time one, as is the case for the majority of us. My first job was as an office assistant for the library director's office at Stanford University. I got this job my freshman year. It paid well and it was on campus, close to my dorm and on my way to classes.

The work involved delivering interoffice mail and submitting expense reports to the travel office. I also made photocopies and did office-related work that needed to be done.

Part-time jobs abound. They can be in an office setting, in a retail location such as Walmart or Macy's, or in the food service industry at locations such as Starbucks, In-N-Out, Panda Express, and other similar businesses.

Although not glamorous, part-time work provides you with at least these three benefits:

- » **Money:** This is the obvious benefit. Unless you're volunteering for a nonprofit, you need to get paid for your time and effort. A part-time job gives you spending money.
- » **Flexibility:** This is one of the key benefits, especially if you're in school or have other obligations. While you're in school, your focus should be on your education and not so much on work. A part-time job gives you the flexibility to earn money on a schedule that fits around your classes.
- » **Work ethic:** This is often an understated benefit, but your first job is also the way you learn about the value of working hard and working with others. A job also forces you to be on time and teaches you to deliver on your commitments. Future employers will infer you have these qualities when they see your work experience.



REMEMBER

An employer looking at two almost-identical résumés will most likely pick the one with the previous work experience, regardless of the work, compared to the one that doesn't have any work experience.

Getting part-time work is usually easier than getting an internship or a full-time job. You can either walk in and apply in person or go online and submit an application. It may take you a few days or two to four weeks to find a part-time job if

you focus on it. And the less picky you are about the job, the more likely you are to find one sooner.

Some employers will require a résumé while others won't. Either way, make sure to have your résumé handy in case the employer asks for a copy.



TIP

Check out Chapter 8 for help with crafting a great résumé.

Securing Internships

Having at least one internship under your belt will greatly improve your chances of getting a good job when you graduate from college. According to AfterCollege, doing at least one internship while in college means you're six times more likely to have a job lined up by graduation compared to those who didn't have any internships.

Internships add experience to your résumé and they help you get in the door, especially at highly coveted employers. Here are some of the things you get with the right internship:

- » **Gain experience.** They give you relevant knowledge in a field or industry. This helps convince employers down the line that you have relevant knowledge, improving your chances of getting a great first job.
- » **Try before you buy.** Hopefully you have great internships and value the experience you gain. But if you don't have a good experience, this is still okay. An internship lets you figure out what an employer is like or what an entire industry is about. It gives you a reality check so you can make sure you want to pursue the path you've put yourself on. If you like the employer and the industry, you can keep moving forward with confidence. If not, then you have time to consider a different path and different employers before you graduate.
- » **Get your foot in the door.** Some employers also like to try before they buy. They invest time and resources into creating internship programs that serve as pipelines to hire new college graduates. Often, an internship can serve as your ticket to a full-time job after you graduate. So, if you have a company you really want to work for, focus on getting an internship there.
- » **Make contacts.** A good internship allows you to develop professional relationships with fellow interns and with the employer. If you do a good job and like the employer, you may get invited to apply for a full-time job upon graduation. You may also make contacts who can recruit you into other organizations if they decide to move on.

» **Fill your résumé.** At a minimum, internships provide material to fill your résumé and they show you have experience. The employer name, if it's a recognizable one, also adds value.



REMEMBER

An internship shouldn't be primarily about the money. The experience and insights you gain and the ability to list the experience in your résumé are far more valuable.

An internship doesn't have to be full-time for you to benefit from it. If you need the money and take an unpaid internship or a low-paying one, consider doing it part-time. You can then use any remaining hours in your day to work a part-time job that pays you well.

Internships, especially good ones, are hard to get. Start looking for these early and do the following:

- » **Leverage on-campus resources.** Go to your university career center to see how it can help you secure an internship.
- » **Start looking in the fall.** Most students look for jobs and internships from January to May before they graduate. Start earlier to get ahead of the pack.
- » **Use your connections.** Ask friends and family connections for help. An internship lasts a few months only. Ask your parents, aunts, and uncles if they can call in favors and help get you an internship.



TIP

Read Chapter 5 to learn about the resources you can use to find an internship.

Finding Your First Job after College

Your first job marks a major milestone in life as it sets the course of your career path. So, in other words, make sure you find a job you like. You should plan on staying at your job for at least 18 months in order to make a meaningful contribution. That's also enough time for you to start building a professional network, and to make a good impression.

The more time and attention you put into your search, the more likely you are to get the job you want. It can take months to find the right job, especially if you wait until the end of your college years.

Here are some ways to ensure you speed up your search:

- » **Sign up for on-campus interviews.** Most colleges have employers who come to interview on campus. The process is similar to a conveyor belt, with events such as information sessions and deadlines of when to sign up for interview slots. Make sure you sign up to interview with some of these employers. Being on the conveyor belt ensures you get exposed to opportunities. Missing it could lower your chances of having a job when you graduate.
- » **Have internships.** Previous internship experience matters. It gives you a leg up by giving you exposure to previous employers who may also offer you full-time employment upon graduation. It also makes you stand out above those who haven't had internships.
- » **Start early.** Start looking for your first job early in the academic year or even a year before you graduate. Yes, this is easier said than done. You don't have to go full on and look for a job. You can start exploring at your own pace.

Knowing the Importance of Your First Job

Your first job, whether it's an internship or a full-time one, is important for many reasons. It determines your career trajectory. It can set you up for success if everything aligns or it can give you a slow start if for some reason it doesn't work out as expected. Knowing the different aspects to consider in your first job allows you to make a better decision on which opportunities to pursue.

Getting exposed to an industry

More important than the employer is the industry in which you're getting into. If you go to work for an insurance company, you'll gain knowledge and eventually some expertise in the insurance field. Likewise, if you go to work at a company like Facebook, you'll be in tech, and more specifically, in the media space.

Whatever job you choose, make sure you have some interest in the industry to which the employer belongs, and think about where you'd like to spend some meaningful amount of time in the space.

Are you going into an industry that's growing or one that is in a state of change? You may thrive in one that is looking to innovate, such as the media space where news is evolving from print to digital. Or you may choose to play it safe and go into a proven space like tech.

Doing the job itself

The actual work you'll be doing will move you to specialize in a certain area and you'll gain a specific set of skills. Having an idea of what kind of work you'll do in a job will give you insight into what types of skills you'll acquire over time. Make sure these are the skills you want to develop.

For example, if you choose to take a sales role, you'll learn about sales techniques and develop certain skills sets. Over time, you'll know if this is the job for you. Will you like constantly interacting with people or would you rather have a role behind the scenes?

Building your professional network

Your first job is not just about what you do but also about whom you do it with. Having good colleagues with whom you can collaborate makes all the difference in the world. These are individuals who will help you in your career. They can pull you with them to other organizations as they move.

You can also hire them to go work with you if you ever decide to go to another employer.

The right group of co-workers can help increase your chances of being successful, both at your current job and throughout your career.

Setting a Goal for Yourself

As I mention earlier, it can take months or even over a year to find your first job, depending on what you're looking for.

Setting goals helps people complete a certain task or challenge faster than they would if they didn't have any milestones at all.

Here are some ways to use goals in order to find your first job faster:

- » **Set an overall goal.** By when do you want to have a job? This could be a month from now or next year. Whatever your date, set a stake in the ground and make a goal for yourself to motivate yourself to start looking.
- » **Create small milestones.** A distant goal always looks achievable, but as it approaches, you may find yourself struggling to meet your own deadline. Create small goals for yourself on when you want to write your résumé and when you want to apply for your first job.



REMEMBER

If you miss your own internal deadlines, it's okay. The point is to put a stake in the ground and take steps forward, instead of lingering and never moving.

Having expectations

The time and effort it takes to find your first job is often directly correlated to the quality of the employer. In other words, if you're applying for a job at a well-known employer like Google or Facebook, expect to have a lot of competition and expect the process to take longer. Employers with a well-known consumer brand attract a lot of job seekers. As a result, they can take their time in choosing whom they hire.

On the other hand, if you find a job you like at an employer that is not well known, then you should have less competition and an easier time getting in the door.

This was the case for me when I graduated from college. I wanted to learn more about the web and the Internet, so I applied for a job as a project coordinator at a little-known company called BBN. BBN was started by the people who invented the Internet. The modem was also invented at BBN, and the person who invented email and decided to put the @ sign between the username and the domain name also worked at BBN.

The company didn't have a well-known employer brand, but it was a great company nonetheless. BBN invented so much technology and hired a lot of smart people (I may have been the exception). When BBN recruiters went to interview at Stanford, not many students applied to interview with them because no one knew about BBN. I had waited until the last minute my senior year to apply for jobs (the opposite of what I preach in this book) because I didn't know what I wanted to do. So I applied to BBN, was interviewed, and ended up getting the job. I got lucky.

The moral of this story is to be aware that if you apply to a popular employer, you may have to work harder and wait longer than if you apply to a less popular organization.



TIP

My advice to you is to start early and to put in the hard work to get the job you want, regardless of the employer's popularity.

Creating a timeline

To get an idea of how long it may take you to get your first job, create a simple timeline and keep it the back of your mind as a reminder. Table 1-1 illustrates the steps involved in the job search process and gives estimates of how long each step may take.