

# What's next?

A practical guide for exploring your job opportunities outside academia

Chiara San Giorgi  
Jasmien Van Daele



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Chiara San Giorgi  
ECOOM Ghent University

Jasmien Van Daele  
Department of Personnel & Organization Ghent University

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“Doctoral studies should at least increasingly take into account that only a minority of the students continues to work in the academic world and that academics should therefore be adequately prepared for the non-academic labour market.”\*

Dr. Dirk Van Damme, Department Head of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation  
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

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ECOOM & Ghent University Career Development Office  
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# Introduction

What is it? A practical guide that will help you find your perfect job.

Who is it for? Any PhD or postdoctoral researcher who is struggling with the question “What’s next after my PhD or postdoc?”, or who is looking for new professional directions or job opportunities.

Are you about to finish your PhD and wondering where to go from here? Have you been working as a postdoctoral researcher for some time now and are you wondering what your potential could be on the non-academic labour market? Are you lost on where to start and how to search for a new job? This guide will provide you with some practical questions that will help in getting to know yourself better. It also contains several tips that will help you find the right job that will hopefully make you happy.

Managing your career today is less about having a straightforward plan and more about taking a broad and open approach to your own employability and professional future. Research has shown that the majority of researchers after completing a PhD or postdoc pursue a career outside academic institutions. This manual will help you to explore your options!



Treat your career exploration with the same approach and vigour as you would handle your research project. Break it up in smaller steps.

This guide consists of three practical sections, reflecting the subsequent stages in career exploration. Going through these three stages just once will probably not be enough. You may need to repeat steps or go back to particular questions or exercises once in a while before finding the job you are looking for.

- » The first step is a self-assessment. Stop and take note of where you are in your professional life. Take a closer look at yourself. Get to know what drives you and what your skills are.
- » The second stage consists of a career/job exploration. In this stage you'll answer several questions to get an idea of which jobs/occupations will suit you.
- » In the final stage you'll learn how to present yourself at your best to an employer. On top of that, practical guidelines on how to write a CV and cover letter will be provided.

These steps will make you as prepared as possible when a contract comes to an end or when the next job opportunity presents itself. Life is all about seizing opportunities. Make the best of it and go for it!

## Self-assessment: Discover your talents

The first step involves assessing yourself and what really matters to you. Before you start looking at possible jobs, you need to know who you are. You should be aware of your talents, strengths, main motivators, etc. Knowing what your assets are is the first step in making an informed and conscious career decision.

## What can I do? My skills and competencies

Think of what a normal workday currently looks like for you. Which tasks do you regularly perform?

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Think of some of your most successful experiences or key achievements (inside and outside work). What did YOU do, how did you realize these successes and what was the result?

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What went less well? What has been a setback (inside or outside work)? How did you cope and what did you learn from it?

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“The PhD is just a piece of paper; what matters are the skills you developed to get there.”

Dr. Katrijn Vanderweyden, Head of the Foundation for Innovation & Labour, SERV

## Which skills do you have?

As a researcher you have more to offer than just your specific knowledge-based skills that come from your particular field of study. **Employers outside academia are (sometimes even more) interested in your transferable skills and experience.** A transferable skill is an ability that is learned in one context and that can be applied in another. The relevance of your specialist skills and knowledge depends on the job you apply for. Note that not all of your transferable skills have to come from your research experience. For example, you might just as well have developed some transferable skills during your spare time. Write down which skills you possess. You can find examples of transferable skills on the next page.

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There are many benefits to hiring people with academic research experience  
To sum up a few, they:

- » have good research skills
- » think analytically
- » have large experience with writing reports
- » can work independently
- » have experience in giving presentations
- » are quick learners
- » have the ability to persevere in harsh circumstances
- » are good problem-solvers

Some examples of (transferable) skills that are common among researchers<sup>1</sup>:

Skills	Relevant experience
<b>Discipline-specific skills</b>	
Discipline-specific skills	Technical and field-related knowledge and skills linked to your domain
<b>Research skills</b>	
Research methodological	Identifying resources, designing and performing experiments, collecting data, identifying difficulties, effective and comprehensive information seeking
Analytical	Analysis of data, breaking problems down into few manageable units, interpretation of data and analysis
Learning	The ability to learn quickly and grasp new concepts, broad-based knowledge acquisition, information literacy
Debating	Articulating ideas, peer group discussion, supporting your positions based on logic
Research management	Project management, project planning and delivery, goal-setting and managing resources to achieve results
Critical thinking	Critically synthesizing information from diverse resources, being self-reflective
Problem-solving	Anticipating short-term problems, finding solutions for unexpected bumps along the road, finding out why an experiment failed
<b>Communication</b>	
Teaching	Teaching students on a specific matter, explaining difficult ideas and complex matters to a broad audience, giving advice, facilitating a group
Oral	Teaching, explaining research to those without specialist knowledge, presenting papers, interviewing, public speaking, presenting at seminars
Listening	Listening actively, showing empathy
Writing	Publishing papers, writing project reports and journal papers
<b>Interpersonal</b>	
Supervisory	Explaining and advising, establishing work schedules which will allow students to meet the needs of the course, motivating and inspiring others, supervising students and guiding them through their bachelor or master thesis, people management
Counselling	Supporting, facilitating, listening, supervising students, persuading through listening, motivating and influencing where needed
Negotiating	Preparing grant applications, negotiating contracts, generating income and funding
Teamwork	Collaborating with fellow researchers, sharing equipment, bench/desk space, recognizing and acknowledging contribution of others

<b>Leadership, planning &amp; organizing skills</b>	
Leadership	Establishing a team, setting research lines and goals
Time management	Meeting deadlines, successfully completing work while under pressure
Organizing	Dealing with the collection of large quantities of data/information and processing it efficiently
IT	Using word processing, statistics, spreadsheet packages etc., using a variety of media
Business awareness	Financial budgeting, fund-raising and contract negotiation, meeting targets to gain additional funding, writing progress reports
<b>Personal characteristics</b>	
Perseverance	Having the capacity for hard work in the face of difficulties, willing to receive constructive criticism
Resilience	Maintaining your commitment to a project despite future uncertainty or when obstacles arise
Adaptability	Regularly taking on different projects and roles throughout your career, being responsive to change
Self-motivation	Working without supervision, to your own timetable, self-management
Independence	Thinking and working independently, being pro-active when planning and conducting research
Creativity	Developing new hypotheses and coming up with new angles to research a subject

For more inspiration for skills and competencies, go to:

- » [www.blogs.nature.com/naturejobs](http://www.blogs.nature.com/naturejobs) and look for the post titled 'How to recognize your transferable skills'.
- » [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk): under 'professional development' you'll find a link to 'The Vitae Researcher Development Framework' on the left.
- » [www.nielsongroup.com/articles/list\\_of\\_competencies.pdf](http://www.nielsongroup.com/articles/list_of_competencies.pdf)

"PhDs have a more holistic vision, and many organisations are looking for people who are highly educated and also have the competencies of the future, i.e. being able to think holistically, being critical, innovative, establishing links and thinking outside the box. These are competencies that can be found in PhDs."

Fons Leroy, Managing Director, VDAB

<sup>1</sup> Based on 'University Researchers and the Job Market: A Practical Career Development Resource for Research Staff', by AGCAS (The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services), 2009, p. 12 ([http://www.agcas.org.uk/agcas\\_resources/115-University-Researchers-and-the-Job-Market](http://www.agcas.org.uk/agcas_resources/115-University-Researchers-and-the-Job-Market)) and on the Vitae Research Development Framework (<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/researcher-development-framework-rdf-vitae.pdf/view>).



**Do you need help in identifying and enhancing your transferable skills?**

Check out the career development or transferable skills programme offered by the Career Development Office or Doctoral Schools of your university.

"I think PhDs have entrepreneurship, maturity and persistence in their DNA anyway because they report to their promoter and give direction to the Master's students they assist. They also often have the qualifications to work in a team."

Dr. Philip Buskens, Vice President Verbund Site Development & Optimization, BASF Antwerp

**What do I want? My values, motivators and drivers**

What aspects of your life (inside and outside work) give you energy? Which specific tasks and activities do you like and which skills do you like to use? Explain why.

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Which specific tasks and activities (inside and outside work) deplete your energy level and which skills would you prefer to use less? Explain why.

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Why did you decide to do a PhD or postdoc? Is the original motivator still applicable? Did others have an influence on your decision?

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Below is a list of possible motivating factors, also known as career anchors or drivers; this list is not exhaustive, you can add others. Mark each of them on a scale from 1 = not important at all to 5 = very important<sup>2</sup>.

Motivator	1	2	3	4	5
Ambition					
Authenticity					
Autonomy					
Become an expert					
Being a mentor to others					
Caring					
Challenge					
Corporate responsibility					
Creativity					
Deliver quality					
Dialogue					
Equity					
Friendship					
Health					
Helping others					
Helping the community					
High level of responsibility					
High salary					
Interaction with others					
Job flexibility					
Job security					
Job control					
Leisure time					
Lifelong learning					
Modesty					
Opportunity for advancement					
People management					
Politeness					
Recognition for my work					
Respect					
Self-esteem					
Status outside the organization					
Status within the organization					
Striving for perfection					
Teamwork					
Togetherness					
Using technical expertise					
Variety					
Voice					
Working alone					
Work-life balance					

Look at the top five highest scoring key motivators, why are they important to you?

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How many and which of your key motivators are being met by your current job? And how many and which ones are in conflict with your current job?

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Which key motivators would you consciously look for in a new job?

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Which of your key motivators are you prepared to give up if necessary?

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**Exercise: My future work self**

After answering all of the previous questions, you'll now have a better idea of what drives and motivates you and what your skills and competencies are. Now, think of what an ideal typical workday would look like five years from now. Which tasks are you performing? What are your roles/responsibilities? What would your workday look like in the ideal world where you would have complete freedom?

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**Summary of my self-assessment**

When assessing yourself, it might be helpful to make a SWOT analysis. Fill in the quadrant below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
What do you consider your areas of expertise? What are you good at? Which skills do you already have that you would like to use in your job? What gives you energy and makes you experience a 'flow'?	What could be seen as weaknesses in your future job? Which skills are missing and how can you fill in the gaps? Which skill could you improve on and get better at?
Opportunities	Threats
Which skills do you think you'll need to develop in your future job? Which skills do you already possess and would you like to develop further in your work?	Which skills suck the energy out of you? What obstacles do you face? Which skills do you have that you don't want to use (too much) in the job?



**For more inspiration for your SWOT analysis go to:**

- » Personality traits: <http://ideonomy.mit.edu/essays/traits.html>
- » Personal qualities & characteristics checklist:  
<http://www.muskingum.edu/home/careerservices/PDFs/PersonalQualities.pdf>
- » Strengths & weaknesses: [www.tickle-project.eu](http://www.tickle-project.eu). Enter the toolbox and type in 'List of strengths and weaknesses' in the search bar, then go to instruments.

**For more information and tools to help you in your self-assessment go to:**

- » My Individual Development Plan: <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>
- » Get to know yourself: [www.nature.com/scitable/ebooks](http://www.nature.com/scitable/ebooks): go to 'Career Planning' (at the bottom of the list of Ebooks) and click on 'Guide to Life Science Careers', select Unit 1: Know Yourself.
- » Assessing your talents: [www.porot.com](http://www.porot.com). Select 'Self-assessment' in the taskbar.



**Extra tip!**

**How do your friends and family see you? What do they think your strengths and weaknesses are? And what about your supervisor and colleagues? What is their feedback on your performance and results?**

Discuss your professional SWOT analysis with people in your direct professional and personal life. People who know you well could offer a good sounding board for reflection upon your future. This may give you some leads that you had not thought of before or on your own.

## **Career exploration: Discover your labour market**

Once you know what your talents, skills and values are, it's time to explore and research your options. During this career exploration, you'll investigate career directions and job profiles that satisfy your requirements. Just as with a research project, you need to launch yourself into the unknown. We are confident that there are other jobs outside academia that'll suit you and will match your skills and interests. Exploring new career horizons is, for everyone, like travelling in a foreign country. Though this may seem daunting, stepping away from what you already know can present you with a wider choice of opportunities. Take time to open up and explore your future options.

To get a better idea of what jobs would suit you, there are several questions you could ask yourself.

### Me in my job

Do you want to build on what you already know or do you want a complete change and start with something new?

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What do you want your new career to offer that your current career doesn't?

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How important is it for you to develop yourself content-wise so that people seek your advice as an expert? Why? And if not, why not?

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Do you want to evolve further into a management level function? Why (not)?

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### Leadership versus management

Being a leader or being a manager are two different things. While a manager is more focused on the process, a leader is more concerned with his team. A leader creates a vision and motivates employees to align their self-interest with that of the company. A leader seeks the truth, isn't afraid of taking risks and turning into a new road. A manager on the other hand, sets priorities, allocates resources and tries to achieve the organization's objectives.

For a more detailed account on the difference between leadership and management, go to:

- » [www.changingminds.org](http://www.changingminds.org) and click on 'Menu'. Select main section 'Disciplines' and go to 'Leadership'. Under 'Leadership articles' you'll find an article on leadership vs. management.
- » [www.educational-business-articles.com](http://www.educational-business-articles.com) and use the search bar to look up the article 'the leadership versus management debate'.

Would you like to start your own business or enterprise? Would you like to put your research into practice or develop a new product?

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If you want to assess your potential to become a successful entrepreneur or want to work out your business plan, go to:

- » [www.hunchup.be](http://www.hunchup.be)
- » <http://www2.unizo.be/startsimulator/> (Dutch)

### Me and others

Do you prefer working alone or with others, in a team? Why?

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What type of people do you enjoy working with and what type of people would you prefer not to work with? Explain why.

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Do you want to work with a steady team or continually meet new people?

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What role do you spontaneously pick up when working in or with a team?

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## Me and the organization

What type of work environment do you prefer and what type of work culture do you thrive in? Do you prefer a self-driven environment or a lot of supervision, an open culture or more hierarchy etc.?

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Which values need to be endorsed by an organization or what does the organization need to pursue for you to be interested (e.g. target-oriented, growth-driven, money-driven, quality, corporate social responsibility, helping society, developing employee potential and well-being, innovation, honesty and openness, striving for success, fair trade, integrity etc.)?

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Are there any constraints that you need to take into account such as a need for flexible work hours, range of location, ... in combination with other parts of and people in your life?

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What type of sector, organization and job appeals to you? What jobs have you ever imagined doing? This could be non-profit organizations, large companies, small companies, a scientific institute, an international company etc.

An overview of possible sectors you could apply for (note: this overview is not exhaustive):

Government	Media and entertainment	Education
Research & Development	Advertisement & Marketing	Financial sector
Non-profit	Social profit	Human Resources
Journalism	Museum	Cultural sector
Politics	Arts	Public Relations
Accountancy	Health Care	Consulting (IT, HR, Legal...)
Pharmaceutics	IT	Telecommunications
Recruitment	Production	
Logistics	Distribution, retail, wholesale	

"PhDs often reason that they have to look for a job in their sector, but I suggest that all PhDs look at the options from a broader perspective and think about how they can use their competencies outside the professional area in which they specialise."

Dr. Jo Heirman, Executive Search Consultant at Schelstraete Delacourt Associates

For a more detailed picture of possible jobs, go to:

- » [www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers) and click on 'Researcher career stories' in the left box.
- » [www.versatilephd.com](http://www.versatilephd.com) and select 'careers' on the bottom of the page for an overview of sectors.
- » [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) and scroll down to 'Job Advice'. Select 'Get an insight into different job sectors'.
- » [www.goseethedoctor.be](http://www.goseethedoctor.be) and select 'Testimonials'. Click on 'doctors at work' in the left box for testimonials from PhDs.



#### Perception of the non-academic labour market of PhDs and postdocs

When applying for jobs, you should be aware of how the non-academic labour market views candidates with an academic background. It's important to stress your transferable skills. Go to [www.ecoom.be](http://www.ecoom.be) for testimonials from the non-academic labour market (type in 'PhDs in transitie' in the search bar; an English version is available). In this booklet you can also find quotes from PhDs that are working in a non-academic job.



#### Exercise: Map out your dream job(s)

Approach this exercise as you would take up a literature review: gather useful information and process it. There are three options when doing this.

First, you could search for vacancies that interest you and collect those that attract you. Don't think about if you are suitable for the job and if you would be able to get it. Pick out any job advert that draws your attention, just based on the content and your interests.

A second option would be to ask about the occupational profiles or career stories of colleagues, friends and family. Use the network of your supervisor or other people in key positions in your domain. Tell them that you are proactively looking for a job (do not expect them to know this!) and talk about potentially interesting organizations to work for.

A third possibility is to leave your desk and go to career or network events in your field or the field you are interested in and explore the types of jobs that are out there.

**TIP!** Universities often organize career events for their researchers - for instance: 'From PhD to job Market' and the 'Job Market for Young Researchers' by Ghent University, PhD Job Fair KU Leuven and Talent Forum UAntwerpen. Universities also offer career workshops, individual counselling and/or CV screening. Check out the webpages of the HR Office at your university or Doctoral Schools administration.

Whatever strategy you use, ask yourself the following questions:

- » What type of job is it?
- » What do I find appealing about this job?
- » What do I like less about the job?
- » What is the recurring theme amongst these jobs?
- » What have other people in my domain done?

For more information to guide you through your career exploration, go to:

- » [www.stanford.edu](http://www.stanford.edu) and look for 'PhD and postdoc career guide' using the search bar.
- » [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) and select 'Postgraduate study'. Go to 'PhD Study' and click on 'Your PhD, what next?'
- » [www.leavingacademia.com](http://www.leavingacademia.com)
- » <https://cdc-tree.stanford.edu/>
- » [www.hortensii.wordpress.com](http://www.hortensii.wordpress.com) and look for the article 'For PhDs who need a non-academic job' using the search bar.
- » [www.list.ly](http://www.list.ly) and look for the list 'Finding your career path' using the search bar.

Discipline-specific sites – some examples:

- » History: [www.beyondacademe.com](http://www.beyondacademe.com)
- » Humanities and Social Sciences: [www.careereducation.columbia.edu](http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu) and look for the article 'Non-Academic Career Options for PhDs in the Humanities and Social Sciences' using the search bar.
- » Psychology: [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) and click on 'careers'.
- » Life Sciences: [www.biocareers.com](http://www.biocareers.com) and go to the blog.
- » Mathematics: [www.maa.org](http://www.maa.org) and click on 'careers' at the top right.
- » Physics: [http://poplarware.com/personal/leave\\_physics](http://poplarware.com/personal/leave_physics)
- » Science, Technology, Math and Engineering: [www.careereducation.columbia.edu](http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu) and type in 'Career Exploration for Ph.D.s in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Disciplines' in the search bar.

## Applying for jobs: From preparation to practice

The two previous sections have prepared you for your actual job hunt. By now, you should have a better idea of the direction you want to and should go in. Everything you have been reflecting on will be put into use once you start your job search. You can use that knowledge while writing your CV and cover letter and while you prepare for a job interview.

## Job search

Many people rush at a job search and apply for jobs they have little interest in or for jobs that they are unlikely to be shortlisted for. When applying for jobs, it's better to **begin with the jobs that appeal to you most** and fit you best. This will enhance your chances of finding the job you love. Use the self-assessment and career orientation results to help you find the ideal job.

**Set specific goals** and split your goals up into short-term ("Within two weeks, a draft of my CV needs to be finished") and long-term goals ("Within two months, I want to have been invited to at least three interviews"). You may need to adjust your goals from time to time, but setting goals will motivate you during your job search and will help you push through when you face difficulties.

Good **preparation is key to success**. Do your homework before making any kind of approach. Look up information on the organization and search their website to get an idea of what it is exactly they are looking for. Try to get in touch with people who know the organization and the kind of people they hire.

## Networking

When looking for jobs, networking is a key to success! 60 to 80% of jobs for higher-educated people come from hidden networks and are never advertised. So use your professional network and your network of friends, family and acquaintances to access these networks. They can lead to useful information or even interesting vacancies or help you get in touch with an organization. Invest time in building up a network and connecting with others. It really pays off!

"As a PhD, you have to see for yourself where your added value can be useful. That is why it's important to expand your network during your doctoral studies and to establish contacts with the corporate world."

Dr. Stefanie De Man, Export Project Manager at Bpost



### How do you identify your professional network?

First of all, think about people you already know. Then think about people you are acquainted with such as friends of family, friends of friends or relatives of friends etc. Your current professional network could include your previous and current collaborations with organizations, people you met at conferences, people you wrote an article with, your PhD examiners, people in your research team etc. Your supervisor is also part of your professional network; extend your own network by tapping into his or her network. Don't be afraid to do so. Their network could be very useful to you.

When networking, be clear about what you want and need and give people the opportunity to respond. But don't be too direct. People will be more inclined to help you when asking "who do you think I should contact regarding..." instead of "will you hire me as a...?". **A request for advice** is more likely to generate a response than asking for a job.

Questions you could ask when networking:

- » "How did you get involved in the \_\_\_\_\_ industry?"
- » "What advice would you give someone just starting out in this business?"

- » "What experience did you have to get your job?"
- » "What would be a typical next career move for someone in your position?"

For more possible questions to ask, go to:

- » [www.law.harvard.edu](http://www.law.harvard.edu) and hover over 'Careers'. Select 'Public Sector Career Services' and go to 'Job Search Toolkit'. Scroll down to 'Networking, interviewing and negotiating' and click on 'Networking tips'. At the bottom of the page you'll find 'sample networking questions'.

While you're at it, conduct informational interviews. For more tips on informational interviews, go to:

- » [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com), hover over 'Career Resources' and click on 'Browse Career Advice'. Under 'Career Paths' click on 'Professional networking'. Look for the article 'Informational Interviewing' using the search bar.
- » [www.idealisticareers.org](http://www.idealisticareers.org) and go to 'Resources'. Scroll down to 'Resources for your career' and click on 'Informational interview'.
- » [www.thepostdocway.com](http://www.thepostdocway.com) and look for the blog 'Michelle's Career Advice Corner' using the search bar. Michelle's tip number 5 is on informational interviews.



### Exercise: Prepare your elevator pitch

An elevator pitch is a short presentation of yourself that lasts around 30 to 60 seconds in which you highlight your selling points. Have this ready and prepared when you meet a possible future employer. For more information on an elevator pitch, go to:

- » [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com), hover over 'Career Resources' and click on 'Browse Career Advice'. Under 'Career Paths' click on 'Professional networking'. Here you'll find an article on 'How to write your professional elevator pitch'.
- » [www.idealisticareers.org](http://www.idealisticareers.org) and use the search bar to look for the article titled 'A quick guide to writing your elevator pitch' (with examples).
- » [www.thepostdocway.com](http://www.thepostdocway.com) and use the search bar at the bottom of the page to find the blog titled 'Elevator Pitches for Scientists: What, When, Where and How'.

Networking can take place at events where you meet people face to face, but it can also take place online. LinkedIn is an ideal online platform to connect with others and potential employers. The website is actively being used by recruiters to find applicants. So make sure you have a profile and update it regularly. LinkedIn should be used as part of an integrated job seeking strategy. Some tips:

- » Use a professional picture.
- » Use a professional headline. Make use of keywords that will enhance the odds of your profile to pop up when recruiters are searching.
- » Join groups. This puts you into contact with people who have a similar profile. You can enhance your visibility and show your expertise by posting updates or articles in the group.
- » Use the connections you already have to introduce you to others.

For more tips on networking, visit these websites:

- » [www.wikihow.com/network](http://www.wikihow.com/network)
- » [www.cheekyscientist.com/how-to-network](http://www.cheekyscientist.com/how-to-network)

For more information on LinkedIn, go to:

- » [www.hubspot.com](http://www.hubspot.com) and go to the blog section. Type in 'How to Use LinkedIn: 35 LinkedIn Tips for Professional Networking, Business & Marketing' in the search bar and read the article.
- » [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com) and use the search bar to look up the article titled 'Using LinkedIn™ Effectively'.

## Your CV

Besides your complete personal and contact information, you should include:

- » A short **motivation or personal statement** (50 to 200 words): You state who you are and what you want. Make sure to match your personal statement with the job and the employer's needs. Put forward your selling points. This is quite similar to an elevator pitch. Example of a personal statement:

"Recently graduated as a business economics PhD looking for a commercial analyst position to use my analytical skills, critical thinking and knowledge in a practical and fast-paced environment. My career goal is to assume a role which allows me to take responsibility for the analysis and interpretation of commercial data for a well-respected and market-leading company."

- » Professional **experience**, in chronological order with your most recent experience first. Make sure to address the requirements in the job description as much as possible. Provide examples to prove you have what they need. Past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. As a PhD student or postdoc researcher, when applying for jobs outside academia, you should not give a detailed list of all your publications. Rather, showcase your concrete responsibilities, qualifications and technical and transferable skills.
- » **Education** in chronological order with your most recent education first. Mention your PhD both at the professional experience section and the education section as some recruiters regard it as a complementary study.
- » **Languages, IT skills** and other relevant skills.
- » You could add additional information (such as hobbies, personality traits, your passions etc.) but that is optional.
- » References are optional. If you provide a list of references, make sure you have their permission and inform them about the job you are applying for so they can provide relevant information to the recruiter.

"When I applied outside the academic world, I initially made the mistake of sending my CV with an overview of all my publications and conferences. Only afterwards I realised that this had little or no relevance outside the academic world."

Dr. Stephan Vanfraechem, Managing Director at Alfaport/VOKA Chamber of Commerce Antwerp-Waasland

Some more tips

- » **Do not use an academic CV to apply for jobs outside of academia!** In an academic CV, the focus is on your publications and research activities, whereas in a non-academic CV the focus lies on your (transferable) skills and competencies with examples as proof.
- » Your CV should be no longer than **two pages** (A4). Recruiters only quickly scan a CV. Try glancing at your CV in 30 seconds: does the important information stand out?
- » Do not write one generic CV and send it to all the organizations you are applying for. You'll always have to **make changes in your resume when applying for different jobs**, such as stressing your relevant experience for that particular job. The main structure and body can be the same, but it is important to address each specific requirement of the job description.

For more information on how to write your CV and examples, go to:

- » [www.kent.ac.uk](http://www.kent.ac.uk) and use the search bar to look for the article titled 'How to write a successful CV'.
- » [www.ed.ac.uk](http://www.ed.ac.uk). Go to the bottom of the page and select 'University A-Z'. Select 'Career Service'. Now you have two options. 1) Select 'Information for postgraduate students' and go to 'PhD students'. Click on 'Marketing Yourself Effectively' and read the part on 'Writing a good CV'. 2) Select 'Recruitment' and go to 'CVs and covering letters' and read the part on 'CV talk'.
- » [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) and go to 'Career Advice'. Select 'CVs and cover letters' and read the article on 'How to write a CV'.
- » [www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk). Go to 'Careers' and select 'Career Management'. Click on 'Present yourself' and read the article on 'Creating effective CVs'.

## Your application letter

Your CV and cover letter should complement each other and not be a repetition of each other. The cover letter draws attention to your key skills that are relevant to the job and your CV should expand on that.

Put yourself in the employer's shoes and look at yourself from their perspective. How do you fit the profile? Mention anything that demonstrates your potential and your fit with the job and organization, even if it's something outside of work. Make sure you focus on the most important aspects of the role and link them directly to recent and relevant experience.

Similar to writing your CV, you need to write a different application letter for every job you apply for. Let the job description in the vacancy be your guide!

After sending your CV and cover letter, give the recruiters a week or two to get back to you. After two weeks, you could call them yourself and ask them what they thought of your application. Don't be afraid to be pro-active.



For more information on how to write a cover letter and examples, go to:

- » [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) and go to 'Career Advice'. Select 'CVs and cover letters' and read the article on 'Cover letters'.
- » [www.lse.ac.uk](http://www.lse.ac.uk) and use the search bar to look up the pdf file titled 'Non-Academic Job Applications: Letters and Personal Statements'.
- » [www.law.harvard.edu](http://www.law.harvard.edu) and hover over 'Careers'. Select 'Public Sector Career Services' and go to 'Job Search toolkit'. There you'll find 'Tips on writing your cover letter'.
- » [www.kent.ac.uk](http://www.kent.ac.uk) and hover over 'Business'. Under 'contact' select 'Careers and employability Service'. In the left box select 'For Staff' and go to 'Publications'. Read the publication on 'Making Applications'.

## Your job interview

It is key to prepare yourself well:

- » Look up information on the company and on the job. Find as much information as you can on the company's website. Try to find someone who is doing that job inside or outside the company to get more information you could use in the interview. This creates a positive image and shows your pro-activeness.
- » Never underestimate a first impression! It only takes a glimpse of a second for a first impression to be made and it has an unconscious influence on later decisions. When coming face to face with the recruiter, try to appear confident. Smile and make eye contact. Wear professional clothing. Always be on time, so work out where you are going, traveling times and transport options.
- » Prepare yourself for possible questions the recruiter may ask. The self-assessment and career exploration will come in handy now. All the answers to those questions can help you in answering the questions the recruiter could ask you. Read through the job description and provide as much – preferably recent – evidence of your suitability as possible.



### A few examples of questions the recruiter could ask:

- » Why did you apply for this job?
- » How do you motivate others?
- » How do you normally cope with pressure?
- » Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?
- » What makes you angry?
- » Aren't you going to miss research?
- » Give me an example of a time when you had to convince someone to change their point of view. How did you do this and what was the result?
- » What is your approach to planning and managing tasks?
- » Tell me about yourself. What motivates you?
- » Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? How did you deal with the failure?
- » How do you think your supervisor would describe you?
- » Will you be able to handle fast-paced work?

For more possible questions you could be asked, go to:

- » <http://resources.workable.com/interview-questions>
- » [www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com) and click on 'Naturejobs' on the right. Go to 'News and blog' and under 'Blog' search for the July 4th 2016 article on 'How to answer: Behavioral questions'.

### STAR-method

A useful strategy to answering questions is the STAR-method. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action and Result.

- » (S) First you describe the specific situation in which the behaviour occurred. What happened? When did it happen? Who was involved?
- » (T) Then, you explain your role in this particular situation. Tell the interviewer about the goals you were pursuing and what your expectations of the situation were.
- » (A) Next is the action you undertook. What did you actually do? How did you do it?
- » (R) Lastly, you provide the results that were achieved.



### Example: The employer wants to know how you handle project management

You could use your doctoral thesis as an example and refer to it as one big project:

- » (S) I was at the start of my PhD project.
- » (T) I had to define research questions, a scope and approach and finalize it in four years.
- » (A) I developed a global project plan with subsequent goals, milestones and moments for feedback from my stakeholders and I developed a network of partners to collaborate with. I used this to plan my time effectively and review my progress.
- » (R) As a result my PhD was finished in time and with success.

For more information on how to use the STAR-method, go to:

- » [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) and select 'Browse all options' on the right. Choose 'Money' in the left box and go to 'Careers'. Look for the post titled 'Using the Star technique to shine at job interviews: a how-to guide'.
- » [www.carrieretijger.nl](http://www.carrieretijger.nl) (Dutch) and click on 'Carrière' at the top of the page. Select 'Solliciteren' and go to 'Sollicitatiegesprek' in the right box. Choose 'Gesprekstechnieken' and there you'll find an article on 'STAR methode'.

### Prepare your own questions

At the end of the interview, the interviewer will usually ask you if you have any questions yourself. This is an opportunity for you to get some additional information about the job and the company.



For inspiration on what to ask, go to:

- » <http://money.usnews.com> and click on 'Careers' in the top taskbar. Go to 'Interviewing' and look for the article 'The Best Questions to Ask During a Job Interview'.

### Tests

Know that you'll often have to fill out tests as part of the application process. Usually these are personality tests and intelligence tests, but they can also be in-basket tests, role-playing tests, ability tests, testing of current knowledge etc.

Recruiters use tests to get a better idea of who you are, and whether you'd fit the job. An intelligence test, for example, is often conducted to get an idea of how you'll perform in the job; research has shown that IQ is the single best predictor of job performance.

You can practice assessment tests in advance. To get acquainted with selection tests, go to:

- » [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), click on 'Careers advice' and select 'Interview tips'. Scroll down to 'Psychometric tests' and open the page.
- » <http://be.hudson.com>, hover over 'Job Seekers' and click on 'Assessment and Development centre FAQs'.
- » [www.vdab.be](http://www.vdab.be) (Dutch) and enter the page for 'Werkzoekenden en Werknemers'. Click on 'Solliciteren' and select 'Selectietesten'.

### Do's and don'ts for the interview

Do's	Don'ts
Research the organization before the interview	Arrive late
Review sample questions and practice your answers	Sit before you are offered a seat
Bring extra CV's to the interview	Ask about salary during the initial interview
Dress professionally	Ask about a position for your partner
Bring a list of questions you have for the interviewer	Argue with the interviewer
Bring pen and paper to write things down	Volunteer negative information such as bad habits or traits
When discussing salary, talk in terms of range and not a single figure	Continue interviewing after you have accepted a position
Listen carefully	Not doing your homework before going to the interview
Speak loudly and clearly	Bad-mouth your previous employer
Be enthusiastic	Fail to follow up

For more information on job interviews, go to:

- » [www.ucd.ie/researchcareers](http://www.ucd.ie/researchcareers), click on 'Career Development Support' in the left box and select 'Interview Strategy - Taking Control of the Process'.
- » [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), click on 'Careers advice' and go to 'Interview tips'.
- » <http://be.hudson.com>, hover over 'Job Seekers' and select 'Interview skills'.
- » [www.kent.ac.uk](http://www.kent.ac.uk) and hover over 'Business'. Under 'Contacts' click on 'Careers and Employability Service'. Type in 'Interview skills' in the search bar and click on the top article in the list of queries.

## Good luck!

As a researcher, your job is an important part of your life. However, a lifelong career does not just happen, nor is a career in the 21st century a straight line from A to Z. Consequently, an effective career planning strategy is nothing like rocket science or making one big leap forward, but rather an organic approach of taking little steps, seizing opportunities and being resilient or able to cope with (temporary) setbacks.

The better you are prepared and the more accurate you picture your dream job, the easier it will be to obtain it! This guide will help you during that process. It might get tough at times, but keep your head up. Remember that it can sometimes take a while to find a job, so don't delay your next step. The sooner you begin, the more options you'll have. The more options you have, the better the chances that you'll make the best decision.

Good luck with your job search and the rest of your career!







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