



How to land your ideal graduate role

Practical tips to launch your career in a professional services firm that's the perfect fit for you





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When it comes to your first job – choose wisely

So, uni is officially behind you
(or at least, it almost is).

And now... you have an
exciting road ahead, with
many possible paths to take.
The world is your oyster. And
the possibilities are endless.

We know you're more than
ready to get started.

But don't be too hasty in
blasting out job applications.
And don't jump at the first
offer you get.

Because your first job is more
important than you think.

Your first professional job is a
critical steppingstone to your
long-term success.

The right role in the right
organisation will help you form
the right expectations – and figure
out what you want for your future.

Plus, it can have an important
impact on your career pathway
and long-term earnings.

When you start with the right job:

- You gain valuable skills – technical, interpersonal and organisational
- You get to build a professional network and form strong friendships
- It shapes you with the right mindset and approach to your career
- It makes you a more competitive candidate for later positions

**Put simply:
By getting the
right first job,
you're giving your
career the best
possible start.**

So how do you find – and
then *land* – your dream
graduate role?

That's what this guide is for.

Let's get started

1	First steps: Understanding the market... and yourself	04
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Know thyself – and your work values• List your must-haves• Consider more than salary• Scour the market• Open your mind to different types of firms	
<hr/>		
2	Time for action: How to get yourself out there	09
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review your resume• Craft your cover letter• Create your LinkedIn profile• Check your digital footprints• Mastering job interviews• Tips for online interviews	
<hr/>		
3	You got the offer! Now what?	15
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What to do once you get a job offer• How to evaluate the job offer• How to provide a counter-offer• How to decline a job offer	
<hr/>		
	Final tips to start your professional journey	17
	BellchambersBarrett's Graduate Program	19

1. First steps:

Understanding the
market... and yourself



With so many firms,
roles and opportunities
to choose from, where do
you even start?

With yourself, of course.

To help narrow your search,
you need to first do a self-
analysis to find out what is
important to you. Only then
can you find a match made
in professional heaven.

Know thyself – and your work values

Before you start making career choices, turn your gaze inwards and identify your work values.

Work values refer to the beliefs, ideas and core principles that make up part of who you are. These may include honesty, self-respect, peace or success.

It's not always easy to identify your work values, but it's an essential first step. After all, you'll be happier when your job aligns with your work values.

Your work values can be divided into three categories:

Intrinsic values	Extrinsic values	Lifestyle values
<p>Intangible rewards or incentives, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to help others • Feeling respected at work • Opportunities to take risks and try new things • Having your work recognised 	<p>Tangible rewards or conditions you find at work, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office location • Job security • Remuneration or earnings potential • Autonomy at work 	<p>Personal values that go beyond the office, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending time with family and friends • Opportunity to live in a big city or in the suburbs • Being able to save money • Being able to own a home

To help you determine your work values, take a moment to answer these questions:

- What are your skills, interests and passions?
- What are your strengths and what excites you?
- What would make you wake up in the morning and look forward to going to work?
- Outside of work life, what do you want to pursue or achieve?

List your must-haves

Now let's delve a little more deeply into extrinsic values: what's most important to you in your work environment?

All of us are after different things in a job. So you need to know what excites you – and what *motivates* you. Is it salary, team culture, the type of work... or something else?

Similarly, every organisation is unique, with different strengths to offer.

Ask yourself, what do you look for in an organisation? It could be:

- Opportunities for career advancement
- Great mentorship
- A chance to gain new skills and learn
- Work-life balance
- A good team culture
- Flexible hours
- Convenient location
- Competitive salary

Speaking of salary...

You should always check and ensure that the salary offered is within the standard market rate.

But when all numbers are equal, look out for organisations that might offer additional benefits.

For example, some professional services firms offer full CA or CPA support – including study leave (on top of your annual leave) and other financial packages.

Or perhaps you'll be assigned a mentor to guide and train you. Or you may be offered a flexible work environment.

And some organisations might provide ample opportunities for you to be involved in social events, charities or community support programs.

So, when discussing remuneration, remember to check or ask the organisation what other benefits come with the job.

Scour the market

Now that you have an idea of what you'd like in your future job and company, it's time to cast a wide net to see what's out there.

And the best place to start? Your personal and professional network.

Take the time to speak to people around you – your family, friends and other connections. Let them know what you're searching for and if they have any advice to offer. You never know what these casual conversations can lead to.

Even if there are no direct connections to a job opening, you may well discover other opportunities you've never thought of before, that suit you perfectly.

Meanwhile, take the time to research professional services firms of interest – and become a Google detective.

Read about their team members, corporate values and community initiatives. And get a feel for their workplace culture by scouring their LinkedIn and Facebook pages.

You'll never be 100% sure of what an organisation is like by browsing their website and social channels. But you should be able to grasp at least enough to know if they're worth looking at more closely.

Another thing to look out for, if you can, is employee turnover.

If the company's staff retention rate is low and people are coming and going through a constantly revolving door, that's a sign that the organisation is not a great place to work at.

In other words: put on your Nikes... and *run*.

Bigger doesn't always mean better

Most accounting graduates have their sights set on the Big Four.

While these firms are right for many people, don't assume they're the best fit for *you*.

In fact, there are merits to working for mid-tier and smaller professional services firms, especially when you're fresh out of university. You get to enjoy:

Diversity in clients and work

At top-tier firms, you're often required to specialise in a specific area or industry. Or you're assigned to just one or a few selected clients.

But in a smaller firm, you'll be exposed to a wider range of clients, industries and projects. This gives you the chance to learn more about what suits you, while also developing a more diversified skillset.

Better career growth opportunities

Most small and mid-tier firms do not have a set number of promotion targets carved in stone.

This means you will have greater opportunities to be promoted more quickly – and take on interesting projects and bigger clients sooner.

Mentorship and stronger team relationships

In a smaller firm, it's easier to build a stronger bond with colleagues. This tends to lead to a more friendly and inclusive workplace environment.

Plus, with fewer hierarchical hurdles to jump, you'll get to work directly with senior staff and partners – even as a new graduate.

A healthy work-life balance

Many small and mid-tier firms care about their staff's wellbeing.

And because of that, you won't be expected to sacrifice your personal time just to prove that you are fully committed to your professional duties.

No crazy late-night hours. No unreasonable expectations.

What to look out for in your first job

- A supportive space that allows you to learn and grow
- An inclusive team that shares your values
- Approachable leaders and mentors who are ready to guide you
- Unrestricted opportunity for career advancement
- Reasonable work expectations
- Study support to help you pursue your CA/CPA qualifications

2. Time for action:

How to give yourself the best chance for success



So now you know the values that are important to you. And you have an idea of what kind of firm you'd love to work for. It's time to roll up your sleeves and start the application process.

Review your resume

Newsflash: a generic Word resume that is quickly put together with little thought is not going to cut it in today's job market.

So, take the time to create a resume that reflects your personal brand – and appeals to the company you're sending it to.

Some tips to keep in mind when putting your resume together:

Keep it relevant

You don't necessarily need to include every work experience you've had.

Think of it this way: your resume is not a comprehensive document of your entire career history. Rather, it's a snapshot of why you're the perfect candidate for the job.

So, if you're applying for a junior role at a professional services firm, it's safe to leave out your five years' local dog walking experience.

Highlight skills and strengths

Don't present your previous job positions like a shopping list. Elaborate on what you did in those roles so your prospective

employer can see your abilities and achievements.

If you don't have any professional experience, you can still highlight skills and strengths you developed during your studies or part-time jobs. These could include research skills, presentation skills, leadership and teamwork, or project management. And be sure to include short examples where possible.

Ditch unnecessary details

Your age, date of birth, marital status, religion and favourite political party.

These are all private pieces of information that should play no part in your potential employer's evaluation criteria. So, leave them out.

Ensure the important details are there

Here's what you *do* need to include in your resume:

- Your contact information, including email address, phone number and residential address
- Professional websites or portfolios – but only if you believe they will support your application

- Relevant professional associations that you belong to

Share volunteering experience

Have you ever been involved in community work?

If so, be sure to put that into your resume. Many employers are drawn to people who are passionate about giving back.

Plus, this will get the attention of firms that share your passion for the community – and your value system.

Provide the right references

We're sure mum and dad would sing your praises. But they're definitely not the right referees to include.

Instead, list people who have seen your capabilities in a working environment – preferably without any personal connection to you.

Also, remember to ask their permission before putting their contact information in your resume. You don't want them to be caught by surprise when they receive a call from your prospective employer.

Keep it short and straight to the point

Less is more – especially in your resume. Ideally, limit it to one or two pages.

This means keeping everything as concise as you can. And making sure it's clear and easy to read. For example, use bullet points and simple headers – and stay away from fancy fonts and bright colours.

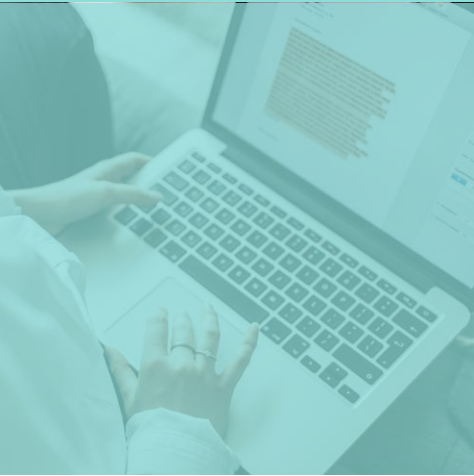
Your resume is certainly not the time to showcase your talent for writing flowery descriptions or quoting Shakespeare.

Check, edit, repeat

Before you send it off, always take the time to proofread your resume. Again. And again.

Your resume, along with your cover letter (which we'll go into detail next), will form your prospective employer's first impression of you.

So if you want to be seen as someone meticulous, sharp and switched-on, you need to be 100% sure there are no grammatical errors or typos.



Craft your cover letter

Prospective employers often look at cover letters *first*. So it's arguably even more important than your resume.

Your cover letter needs to capture their attention, give a good first impression, and tell them why you're the perfect fit – in a snapshot.

Think of it this way: if your resume is to *show* them what you can do, your cover letter is to *convince* them to get in touch with you.

Here's how to write a cover letter:

Stay away from a generic cover letter

Don't use a one-size-fits-all cover letter for all the positions you apply for. Hiring managers can sniff out generic cover letters a mile off.

It might save you time. But it definitely won't bring you results.

Instead, tailor your letter to the specific job you're applying for – by following these tips:

- Position yourself in the best way to show why you fit the role
- Adjust your tone and message to suit the organisation you're applying to
- Show that you have done your research on the role and company

Emphasise your relevant skills and experience

To do this, you need to go through the job description with a fine-tooth comb. Draw out the skills and experience that the firm is looking for – and show them how you match up.

You should also explain why you're interested in the role, why you believe you're the ideal candidate and how you can benefit their team.

Show your humanity with a less formal tone

Don't be afraid to inject a bit of your personality into your letter. (Although, be careful not to be overly casual. Addressing them as 'mate' is a bad idea.)

Use simple words, short sentences and active language to keep your letter easy to read. Avoid jargon and big words as much as you can. Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to use sesquipedalian terms to show your intelligence. (See what we did there?)

You just need to be relatable and easy to understand.

Keep it short and sweet

Nobody wants to read a 10-page essay about how good you are. Especially not busy hiring managers.

So how long should your cover letter be? One page is more than enough.

Proofread, proofread, proofread

Yes, again, always set aside time to proofread your letter with fresh eyes before sending it off.

Make sure there are no typos, grammatical errors, or worse – the wrong company or contact name!

You may also want to ask a friend to read it through at least once, to ensure your letter stands the best chance.

Create your LinkedIn profile

In today's world, a professional LinkedIn profile is no longer a nice-to-have.

It's a must-have.

LinkedIn is a powerful networking tool that has the potential to open many doors – sometimes when you least expect it to. Plus, many employers take to LinkedIn to do a due diligence on prospective employees.

So make them take notice of you by building a positive personal brand and getting your profile right.



Profile photo

Choose the right image for your profile photo. It's best to keep it simple and professional with a plain background.

Preferably not the one from your cousin's wedding with a cocktail in hand!

Cover photo

When used correctly, your cover photo (the banner at the top of your profile page) can help your LinkedIn profile make a strong impression.

Go for a cover photo that complements your personal brand or that shows your personality.

Headline

A strong headline can effectively summarise who you are and what you hope to do.

And some prospective employers do a search on this item when looking for suitable candidates. So, avoid those along the lines of 'Living the dream' or 'Kissing uni goodbye forever'.

Stick with something simple and straight-forward, such as 'Accounting graduate'.

The 'About' section

This is good real estate for you to sell yourself. But try not to go overboard.

Once again, keep it short and to the point, highlighting your strengths and skills that prospective employers should know immediately.

Also, writing this section in first person is a lot more human and authentic than in third person. For example, write 'I am very hardworking' instead of 'Melissa is very hardworking'.

Skills and qualifications

List your work experience – including part-time jobs and internships – and any relevant skills or expertise.

If you assisted in a big project during your internship, put it down.

Volunteer work

It's good to show prospective employers that you are socially aware and passionate about giving back to society.

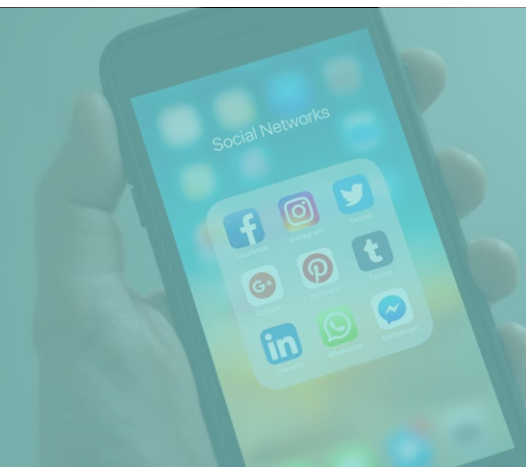
Plus, many hiring managers do view volunteer work as work experience.

Check your digital footprints

Everyone's on social media these days. And we do mean *everyone* – including prospective employers.

So before sending out your job application, it's worth doing a quick check on your social media accounts. Ensure everything is in order. Ask yourself: do you really want your future employer to see you drinking at your mate's twenty-first birthday bash?

That doesn't mean you can't continue sharing candid shots of your life. You can. But if you do? Be sure your account is set to private.



Mastering the job interview

Before	During	After
<p>You want to be as prepared as you can before your job interview. Research the role and the firm. Get to know who your prospective employer is and make sure you understand the position you're being interviewed for.</p> <p>Although you won't know the exact questions you'll be asked, you should prepare your answers to some of the standard ones, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell us about yourself • Why did you apply for this role? • What are your strengths? • What are your weaknesses? • Where do you see yourself in five years? • Tell us about a time when you... [faced a conflict in your team / overcame a challenge / went outside your comfort zone / were most proud of yourself / something else] 	<p>Some basic interview etiquette you need to remember:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn your phone off and keep it out of sight • Be respectful to everyone – from the receptionist to the hiring manager • Keep eye contact and maintain positive body language • Stay enthusiastic and smile • Answer questions as positively and honestly as you can <p>You should also ask some genuine questions of your own at the end of the interview. This shows <i>you're also interviewing them</i>.</p> <p>These questions can relate to what you've been discussing during the interview. Or ask questions that show you've done your research about the firm. As much as you can, stay away from generic questions.</p>	<p>You should send a thankyou email to your interviewer within 24 hours. Keep the email polite but reinforce your enthusiasm for the role.</p> <p>If your interviewer said they will get back to you but haven't, wait a few days before following up.</p> <p>Here's what NOT to do after an interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't replay the interview over and over and beat yourself up over what you didn't do well • Don't harass your interviewer by emailing or calling them constantly • Don't stop your job search process – keep looking until you get the right contract in your hands • Don't brag about the interview on social media

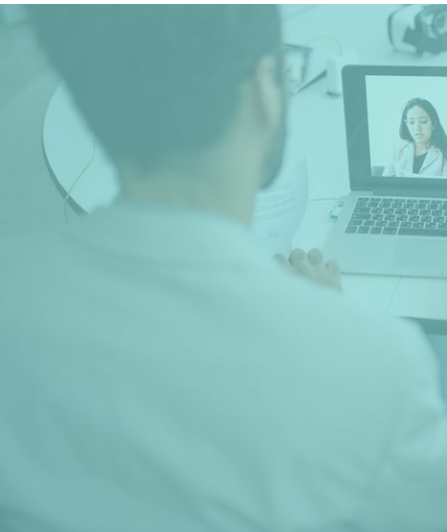
Tips for online interviews

COVID-19 has changed many things – including job interviews.

More and more companies now prefer to conduct job interviews virtually, especially in the preliminary stages.

Although online interviews are similar to in-person ones, there are some major differences that could make or break your chances of success.

Some tips to help you ace your online interview:



Do a test run

You need to be comfortable with the platform your prospective employer will be using for the interview, whether it's Zoom, Skype or Teams. Set it up on your computer, sign up for an account – and figure out how to use it before interview day.

Find the right place

Choose the most professional-looking area of your home for the interview. Rooms with natural light are best. Otherwise, make sure you set up lighting that is not overbright and glaring or that casts shadows on your face. Ensure there's no clutter or distracting objects in the background, such as an open door or a switched-on TV. Go for a blank wall if you can. And no virtual backgrounds. They are distracting and can look unprofessional.

Get rid of distractions

Turn off your phone and keep it out of sight. And silence email or chat notifications on your computer. Also make sure no one else is around. Or at least let everyone know that you're in an interview, so they won't barge into your room. And that includes pets. Your cat might be the cutest feline in the world, but do you really want her walking across your keyboard during the interview?

Look presentable

Just because you're doing the interview from home, doesn't mean you should look like how you do every other day at home. First impressions still matter in virtual interviews. So, brush your hair and dress for success – from head to toe.

Be ready, be early

Being punctual helps you make a good impression. But being early gives you time to be calm and ready. Log into the video platform at least five minutes before your appointment. Test your speaker and microphone and make sure your Wi-Fi works. Have another quick glance through the job description – and run through your prepared responses and questions one more time.

Check that the power is on

If you're using a laptop or tablet, check that it's plugged into a power source or that it's fully charged. You don't want to be stressing about the low battery status during your interview. Or worse – have your computer shut down unexpectedly! Also, if you choose to use a tablet, put it on a flat, sturdy surface and keep it stationary. Do not hold the device, as the screen will appear shaky.

Use good body language

During the interview, try to look directly into the webcam if you can. This allows you to look the presenter 'in the eye'. Keep a good posture – sit up straight and lean slightly forward to show that you're present and enthusiastic. And don't forget to smile!

Relax and be yourself

It's hard not to be overcome by nerves. But it's important to stay as calm as you can, so you can be confident and think clearly. Take deep breaths and remind yourself that the interviewer wants you to succeed.

Your job application checklist

- Identify key requirements from the job ad
- Find out what you need to submit as part of your application
- Tailor your resume to match the job requirements
- Write a cover letter that's tailored to the job
- Proofread and check through your application documents
- Repeat the step above
- Ensure your contact details are accurate
- Submit your application
- Prepare for a potential call from your prospective employer!

Remember: **Sometimes you need to be proactive**

Most companies are always on the lookout for good talent. So even if the firm you're interested in is not advertising a specific job right now, consider getting in touch to send an expression of interest.

3. You got an offer!

Now what?



So, you nailed your application and interview. And you've got an offer! But hold your horses – did you know that you don't have to accept the job offer *immediately*?

What to do once you get a job offer

Make sure it's official

Some employers might offer you the job through a voicemail or a phone call. If that's the case, thank them and express your excitement.

But remember: until you have an offer in writing, nothing is official!

So, if you've received the offer verbally, politely request a follow-up email. Also, it's perfectly fine to ask for more details or clarification if you need to.

Find out when they need a response

Few employers expect you to accept the job offer on the spot. In fact, if they do, you should be wary of them.

Most employers understand that you'll need some time to consider the offer. So reiterate your excitement that they have expressed interest in hiring you. Then find out when you need to respond. And make sure you get back to them by the agreed deadline.

How to evaluate the job offer

Once you've received the formal offer, review the salary and benefits – including perks, leave and bonuses.

Also, decide if the company and the team seem like a good fit for you. Do you see yourself growing in this firm? Do you share the same values?

Remember: consider the non-financial incentives – such as study leave and professional development – can be just as important as salary.

How to provide a counter-offer

If the salary offer is below your expectations, but you are keen on joining the firm, consider negotiating. But do it respectfully and professionally.

Start by thanking the hiring manager for the offer and expressing your interest in the position. Then, suggest how your skills and experience will bring value to the organisation and emphasise how you'll contribute to the team.

Finally, provide a counter-offer that is backed by your research, with a salary range that's within the current market standards.

But you need to be prepared that your counter-offer may be rejected – and decide whether you will accept the original offer or not.

How to decline a job offer

There are times when you may need to decline a job offer.

Perhaps you've decided that the job or the company does not suit you. Or perhaps you have received multiple job offers, accepted one, and now need to inform the other employers.

How should you go about it?

Write a simple email to thank them for the offer and let them know politely that you've decided to decline it.

No matter how tempting it is, don't go silent or ghost the employers.

You don't necessarily need to give a reason for declining the position. But if you choose to, keep it brief and respectful. It's best to maintain a positive relationship with the employer – just in case you want to apply for another job with the same organisation in the future.

Remember: Don't burn bridges!

Even if you were not successful at getting the job, do not snub or be rude to the hiring manager.

After all, the business world is smaller than you think. You never know when your paths will cross again.

Final tips to start your professional journey



Congratulations, you've got the job! And your career has only just begun. Here are some tips to help you make the most out of your job and ensure continuing success.

Speak up

Your ideas and thoughts are valuable. Don't be afraid to share them!

By speaking up, you can show your confidence and add value to your team.

Be proactive

You only learn as much as you want to. So volunteer for tasks. Do extra research. Give yourself something to work on when there's nothing on your plate.

Ask questions

This shows your interest, helps you to understand better and reduces room for mistakes or misunderstanding.

But be mindful not to ask careless questions that may show your ignorance.

Say yes to challenges

Richard Branson once said, "If somebody offers you an amazing opportunity but you are not sure you can do it, say yes – then learn how to do it later!"

Sometimes you'll face tasks that lie outside your comfort zone. Give it a go!

Try to rise to the challenge instead of shrinking away. Taking a leap is often the best way to grow.

Get feedback

If your manager doesn't give you feedback on your performance, ask for it!

It might be daunting at first, but it's always good to know what you're doing well and what you could improve on. Take it as a chance to do better rather than a personal attack.

Keep learning – always and in *all ways*

Find opportunities to learn and expand your knowledge at every turn.

Listen, watch and absorb everything. Shadow your senior colleagues, stay up-to-date with industry news and listen to business podcasts.

Now, go forth and enjoy!

It's all new and may be daunting at times. But remember, you stand to gain so much in your first job. You'll also get to build strong connections with work colleagues at the same stage in life and career – and might even find friends for life.

So, buckle in and get ready for an exciting time!



Fast-growing yet nurturing – the best place to launch your career

At BellchambersBarrett, we're always on the lookout for the talent Canberra has to offer. And we're ready to nurture and support you from day one to ensure your long-term success.

Through our Graduate Program, we provide study support to help you pursue your CA/CPA qualifications.

Other benefits include:

- Mentorship and coaching through our Buddy Program
- Open opportunity for career progression
- Diverse range of clients and assignments
- Inclusive and supportive team culture
- Support for your wellbeing

[Learn more about our Graduate Program](#)

