STRATEGIES TO FIND EMPLOYMENT

This guide outlines an approach to the job search process and describes various job search strategies. Locating a satisfying entry-level position related to your career interests is a time-consuming process, and it can be difficult. The best thing is to take it one step at a time, and start early.

I. SELF ASSESSMENT

Your first step is to identify your skills, strengths and weaknesses, values, interests, personal preferences, and your career and life goals.

- Skills
- Strengths & Weaknesses
- Values
- Interests
- Personal Preferences
- Goals

Skills

- What skills have I developed and used in college, previous work experiences, and activities?
- What are some of my accomplishments?

Strengths & Weaknesses

- What are some of my strengths?
- What are the areas in which I need improvement?

Values

- What are the most important aspects of a job?
- What will give me work related satisfaction?

Interests

- What courses or subjects do I like best?
- How do I spend my leisure time?
Personal Preferences

- How do I prefer to make decisions?
- Do I prefer working with details or ideas

Goals

- What do I want to accomplish with my life?
- What are my short term and long term career and educational goals?

Take time to give serious thought and consideration to these questions. The answers are an important aspect of a satisfying job. If you are honest and thorough in your self-assessment, it will become clear which job aspects are most important to you. You will also avoid the mistake of seeking a job for which you are under qualified or overqualified. If you want help with sorting out your skills, interests, and goals, make an appointment to see a Career Counselor.

II. TARGET YOUR JOB FOCUS AND OBJECTIVE

Your second step involves clarifying what type(s) of position(s) you desire and the type of employers for whom you want to work. Deciding what you want to do can be the most difficult part of the job search process. Begin by asking yourself:

- What type of position and organization will best utilize my skills and talents and will best satisfy my values and goals?
- What is my desired level of responsibility?
- What kind of people do I want to work with?
- What aspects of a work environment are important to me? (i.e., supervision, flexible hours, informal/formal work pace)

To answer these questions, you may need to do some career/occupational exploration to help you identify career fields and entry-level positions that will best integrate your skills, values, interests, and goals. There are various resources in the Career Development Center to assist you in your exploration.

For each career field or job, determine the:

- main duties and responsibilities
- personal qualifications and skills required for the job
- education, training, and experience required
- employment outlook and advancement potential entry-level salary, earning potential, and benefits
- consider any other factors important to you
III. IDENTIFY AND RESEARCH POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

Choosing an Employer
Consider the following characteristics of an employer: size of organization, geographic location, entry-level salary and benefits, salary potential, training provided, opportunity for advancement, organization or corporate culture, and any other criteria that you feel are important.

Compile a list of targeted employers and determine the:

- location and size of the employer
- employer's major products or services
- structure of the organization/division/department
- career advancement and promotion opportunities
- type of training and benefits offered to employees
- organizational culture or corporate personality
- type of people employed by the organization or in the department
- needs and problems of the organization or department
- age, growth pattern of the organization, and the projected future growth
- rank/status of the organization in the industry or field

Ask Your Network of Contacts

- Your parents, their friends, and other family relatives
- Your friends and their parents
- Other students on campus
- Community members and neighbors
- Acquaintances
- Previous employers
- Guest speakers at various campus events
- Occidental College faculty, administration, staff, and alumni
- Members of the local professional and trade associations
- Anyone who can tell you more about the position or employers that you are interested in, and/or individuals who can refer you to people within the organization with the power to hire you

Check with these people to see what they know about the positions and organizations of interest to you. If they are working or have worked in areas related to your career interests, ask your supervisor and/or co-workers about their backgrounds, how they entered the field, how they like their jobs, and any suggestions they might have on how you can break into the field.
IV. PREPARE TOOLS FOR THE JOB SEARCH
Write a well prepared resume that reflects your skills, accomplishments, and experiences as they relate to the position you are seeking. Write cover letters that are customized to the particular position and organization to which you are applying.

Prepare for the job interview. Practice answering typical interview questions. Know the organization and the job requirements of the position. Do your research homework! Prepare a list of questions that you want to ask the employer. Wear appropriate professional attire. Follow up after the interview with a brief thank you letter.

V. DEVELOP A JOB SEARCH PLAN
There is no best method for conducting a job search. You need to determine what strategies will work best for you. The best approach is to use *multiple methods*. Most experts recommend that you begin your search at least three to six months in advance of anticipated employment.

Possible Strategies and Resources

Conduct Informational Interviews
Informational interviews are information exchange meetings where you can learn more about your career field, employers’ expectations, and methods for entering your career field.

a) Identify and talk with people who work in the career areas of interest to you. Ask your CONTACTS for names of individuals currently working in the field.

b) Develop a list of questions you want to have answered in the interview. Do some preliminary research so that you are somewhat familiar with the organization, type of business, and the interviewee’s job.

c) You are not seeking a job from this person. You only want some guidance and possible referrals.

d) Always send a short thank you note to the interviewee.

Networking
More jobs are obtained through a network of personal contacts than through any other source of job leads. Let your contacts know that you are looking for a job. Be specific and tell them the type(s) of positions(s) and employers that you are most interested in.

Develop Additional Contacts
Ask for referrals from your current contacts; join or attend meetings of the local chapter of professional associations related to your career field; participate in internships; become involved in community and religious organizations, college clubs, and student government; and
attend career job fairs and alumni events. Avoid misusing your contacts. Never ask for a job when approaching a personal contact.

**Explore the "Hidden Job Market"**

According to various job–market studies, more than 85% of the jobs available on any given day are not advertised. These unadvertised job openings are referred to as the "hidden job market." These jobs are announced through word–of–mouth.

Some important facts to know: "One out of every five jobs changes hands each year in the U.S. The average job opportunity is known within an organization anywhere from two to ten weeks before it is advertised. Most often, people try to fill an open position by finding someone on an informal or referral basis. Word–of–mouth and internal job postings allow jobs to be filled without the need to advertise. Thus, exploring and understanding the hidden job market offers you the opportunity to identify the jobs you want before anyone else hears about them." (Tom Jackson, author of various job search books and articles.)

Exploring the hidden job market requires that you invest time and money in researching employers, their needs, and their current opportunities. Use the following resources in conducting your research: the yellow pages, employer directories, professional associations, trade journals, and employee and contact networking. Unlocking the hidden job market also requires determination and a certain amount of risk to get on the phone and talk to potential employers. You are bound to get a lot of "NOs", and it is important not to take rejections personally. The more contacts you make, the better your chances that you will receive some "YESes".

**Direct–Mailing Applications to Employers**

Sending large numbers of resumes and cover letters to employers through a mass mailing usually produces only a low rate of response (5% or less.) A better approach is to conduct a selective, direct–mailing based on your investigation of various employers and your identification of the organizations that best match your career goals and qualifications. Secondly, in researching the organization, identify the individual with the authority to hire people for the position you are seeking and send a wellwritten cover letter and resume to that individual. You may also want to send similar correspondence to the employer's personnel office. Your cover letter should be personalized to the specific needs and characteristics of each employer.

**Occidental Career Development Center**

- Occupational information on entry level positions, salary ranges, and current job–market trends
- Limited employer directories and literature
- Full–time job listings in binders
- Meetings with employers through information sessions
- Annual career fairs and local career fair information
- Information guides and other materials on resume writing, cover letters, interviewing, and job search strategies
- Various workshops to prepare students for job search
- Job search books and information folders

**Direct Contact Approach**
This approach involves contacting employers for whom you would like to work without knowing whether a specific job opportunity actually exists.

Identify the person within the organization who has the power to hire you (i.e., department manager). After thoroughly researching the company, send a well prepared resume and targeted cover letter directly to that person.

Contacting employers directly by phone is also an effective strategy for uncovering hidden job openings and general information about the employer.

Follow-through is an important aspect of the job search process. Follow up and be persistent in initiating and maintaining contact with employers to whom you have sent resumes. If you do not hear from the employer within two weeks after sending your resume, follow up with a phone call to the employer.

**Other Strategies**

1. *Classified Ads and Job Listings*: Regional newspapers, trade journals and newspapers, industry newsletters, job lines, etc.

2. *Professional and Trade Associations*: Many associations act as employment clearinghouses of current job openings for both employers and job seekers. A membership fee is often required for placement help and job vacancy listings. Some associations produce their own newsletter or journal.

3. *Personnel & Employment Offices*: Medium- and large-size organizations have personnel departments or human resources offices. Contact these to determine whether they hire people with your career interests and skills, and inquire if they have current job openings in your field. Ask for the name(s) of supervisors or managers who hire people with your qualifications. Contact these individuals by phone or through your direct-mail campaign. These offices are also a good source of general information about the company.

4. *Private Employment Agencies*: They usually work for the employer, not for you, the job seeker. Be careful about signing any contracts regarding fees or exclusive handling agreements.
Some agencies focus their services within specific industries. Working with temporary agencies is an excellent way to gain entry into a particular field/company.

5. State Employment Agencies: Local offices maintain daily listings of job openings in the local area, the state, and the entire nation through a computerized job bank. You can also access Employment Development Department information from the computer-assisted career program, Choices, in the Career Center.

6. Electronic Resources:
   - Resume Database Services

These are operated by independent firms that register job seekers in their database and then permit employers to utilize the database to search for people they want to hire. The advantages of these resources include a greater access to a larger number of employers, expeditiously and fairly inexpensively. Some of the disadvantages might include no guarantee of confidentiality with the current employer, the database does not access the hidden job market, success of the service often depends on one's skills, and relevant experience and type of occupation.

   - Electronic Employer Databases

Several online information service companies now offer classified ads, informal job bulletin boards, and other employment information as part of their services. Some newspapers also have online information services.

   - Federal jobs

Making the Difference is an online resource that offers a tutorial format for college students regarding federal jobs. You may locate federal job listings on www.usajobs.gov.

VI. GET ORGANIZED AND STAY ON SCHEDULE

Maintain a record keeping system (card file, notebook, or database) that includes the names of organizations, names of contact persons, phone numbers, dates of interviews, and any follow-up action needed. Also, record names of additional contacts, job leads, and information learned from interviews.

Collect information about job openings and job-market trends in your targeted fields.

Target the date by which you wish to have a job. Assess the amount of time and energy you need to devote to the job search. Schedule time periods for conducting your job search. Stick with this schedule as much as possible. A successful job-search campaign can easily become a fulltime job.
The more time and energy you put into job hunting, the better your chances for success in the job search.

**VII. HAVE A SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Conducting a job search is hard work, and there may be times of discouragement and disappointment. Having a coach during this period can be very helpful. Keep your spirits up by talking with friends, a counselor, or someone who can give you support and encouragement. Reward yourself after accomplishing various steps in your job search.

If you are experiencing difficulties getting job offers or interviews, make an appointment with a Career Counselor to discuss alternative approaches or to work on improving your job search skills.