

Three Steps to an Effective Job Search



The job search can seem overwhelming to all but the most seasoned veterans of the process, so we hope to simplify things for you by breaking it down into three simple steps. Think of the steps you take when writing a paper. First, you choose and refine your subject, then you dive into your research and, finally, you write the paper. Both of the first two steps are critical to taking the final leap. So it is with the job search.

The purpose of this handout is to lay out each of the three steps in an effective job search: targeting (or choosing your “subject”), researching that target and, finally, making contact with employers.

This handout is intended to help get you started. If you still have questions, please drop by the LMU Office of Career Services in Duke Hall, Suite 304 or send an email: roger.holtsclaw@lmunet.edu.

STEP ONE: Target Your Search

Targeting your search allows you to market yourself to employers that are truly interesting to you, rather than limiting yourself to randomly advertised openings. Lacking a clear target as you embark on this process can be detrimental – like trying to write a paper without a clearly defined subject. Targeting doesn’t completely limit you, however. If you hear of a special opportunity outside of your focus, you always have the option to apply. There are three primary ways to target:

Place: Decide where you want to live and work and research what is available there. LMU Office of Career Services has resources for helping you research the best areas for your job prospects. Visit websites for the area’s Chambers of Commerce or subscribe to the area’s Sunday paper (many newspapers are on-line and libraries often carry editions from major cities).

Your decision about “where” to target may be influenced by size, proximity to ocean or mountains, climate/weather, cultural and entertainment options, types of dominant employers (for example, many publishing companies are in Boston; Charlotte is a banking center; Los Angeles is central to the film industry), or where you have family or friends. It may be more cost effective to move somewhere you have people with whom you can share the rent!

Another consideration about place is that it is extremely difficult to get a job long distance. Generally, you will need to travel for interviews at your own expense. Although you can do a lot of research and networking online, it can be more effective to do so on location. Perhaps that is why so many LMU alumni focus on Southwest Virginia and the East Tennessee area. If you have your heart set on a long distance location, you may be moving there without a job offer. Often students relocate and support themselves by taking an interim or temp job while they continue to search for career track positions. Although it is easy to find and apply for long distance jobs online, you may find that you are not being invited for interviews—employers may see your distant location and simply determine that it is easier for them to interview and hire locally.

Type of Job: Decide what skills you want to use (i.e. writing, designing, etc.), and identify a career and position that would be a good match for your interests, abilities and personality. LMU Office of Career Services can help with this step with assessments, career counseling, externships, and alumni contacts. Targeting by type of job involves identifying what function or role you want to play in an organization. For example, you may be interested in being an event planner, or a sales person, or a writer, or a graphic designer.

If your most important targeting factor is “Type of Job,” you care more about “what” you do than where you do it. One difficulty you may have is matching your skills to work functions. The LMU Office of Career Services can help you research work functions to identify what skills are used in various roles.

Employers : Decide what organizations interest you (e.g. museums, banks, etc.). The LMU Office of Career Services has resources of employers listed by location and career area. The Internet is the best source for current employer information. Use your favorite search engine to locate employer websites and find contact information and possible openings with your employers of choice.

Targeting by employer or type of employer makes sense if you want to break into a particular industry or field. For example, in competitive fields like the film industry or museums you may be willing to begin in most any role/function in order to get your foot in the door. Often the type of employer you choose to target is inspired by an avid interest, such as sports or the environment, politics or theater.

TIP: *Don't limit your targeting to one of the three types. Often it is more effective to focus on at least two of the above categories. For example, you may target event planning jobs (Type of Job) in Washington, DC (Place); or marketing jobs (Type of Job) for performing arts organizations (Employer); or you could use all three types of targets: Writing jobs (Type of Job) for an environmental organization (Employer) in Knoxville, TN (Place).*

STEP TWO: Research Your Targets

You can research geographic areas, career fields and employers by a number of means, including:

- Reviewing an organization's or city's website,
- Checking out books in our library,
- Interviewing people in person or by phone,
- Reading news articles about the organization,
- Using public libraries or other college's career offices.

TIP: *Often other college career services offices and libraries in your target city may have more comprehensive resources focused on job hunting and employers in that city. Most career services offices will allow you to use their resources, just as the LMU Office of Career Services has an open door policy to students of other schools and the public for on site use of library resources. Check out their websites, too.*

TIP: *People can often help with your research! Think about who you know or who might know someone you could talk to in your target city, job type or industry. Often a chain of just several connections can put you directly in touch with someone doing the kind of work you aspire to for an employer that truly interests you.*

Why all this Research? Many great jobs are never advertised anywhere so simply scanning job listings you are likely to see less than 20% of the jobs available, and you may see none in your target area! By doing your research you can identify the employing organizations of the most interest to you. By looking at employer websites you can learn more about the organization, the types of employees they need, their services and products, and often key staff names and contact information. Sometimes a current news story about an employer will even indicate a new need of employees on which you can capitalize (i.e. the organization is starting a new project or is "expected to expand"). Such information can help you to target your resume more effectively and to be more impressive in interviews. Research can also give you a better understanding of the job market in your target industry/field and/or geographic area. Research can help you to feel more in control of your job search and more confident in your contact with employers.

STEP THREE: Contact Employers

Of the three methods of contacting employers listed below, face-to-face contact is usually the most effective.

Face-to-Face

- *Informational interviewing* is a systematic way to make face-to-face employer contacts regardless of the existence of job openings or an invitation to interview for a position. You cannot do too many informational interviews! Set specific goals for yourself to initiate and conduct these interviews weekly. Plan ahead by setting up informational interviews in your target city before you visit. Your informational interviews may be with people who simply may be able to connect you to other people: LMU alumni, professors, friends and parents of friends, your minister or other religious leader, someone doing what you aspire to in Harrogate who may know people doing that work in Nashville or Atlanta or New York.
- *Job Fairs* are another excellent way to connect with employers face to face. Check the LMU Office of Career Services calendar for dates. Check city websites in your target city location for job fairs there; often such events are listed in the local newspaper. Check college career fairs in your city of interest; often you can walk in to these and meet a wealth of local and regional employers. Because community colleges serve a population generally seeking local jobs, their fairs will usually be exclusively local employers. The downside of job fairs is that they typically allow for only the briefest contact. Ask for business cards and

follow up. Contact at a fair may enable you to set up an informational or job interview after the fair.

Phone

The phone can be a good means for setting up information interviews or for following up on letters and resumes you have sent. It is always helpful to have a name to use as a referral source.

E-Mail and Snail Mail

Mass mailing—sending your resume blindly to a personnel office without knowing that a position exists—is NOT an effective way to find a job. Personnel officers often receive hundreds of letters a week and look for reasons to reject resumes. Unless you and the organization/position are an excellent match and you have a superb resume to prove it, your chances are slim. If you write, always address the letter to a specific person, not a title or “to whom it may concern.” If you don’t know who should receive your letter, call and ask for a name and title. Customize your letter as much as possible to focus on the specific employer’s needs. The majority of resumes and cover letters are currently sent to employers electronically, either through the employer’s website or by e-mail. If you apply on an organization’s website, it is still useful to e-mail a specific contact directly. When you e-mail your resume, it is a good idea to both include it in the e-mail and attach it. Although the e-mail version will not look as good as your attached version, some employers will not open your attachment

TIP: *Resume writing and interviewing skills are crucial to a successful job search. The LMU Office of Career Services offers workshops, and handouts you might find useful. In addition, you can have one on one career sessions with the Director of Career Services to conduct resume critiques and mock interviews.*

How Does the Job Market Work?

The top reason employers have a position available is because a staff member has left it (retired, was promoted, left the organization for another job or for personal reasons). Most employers hire for individual positions, not training programs, and often have only one or a few positions open at one time. Because most jobs become available as a result of staff turnover, employers will work to fill a vacancy ASAP to ensure that business goes on as usual. Based on the desired start date, you may not be eligible to apply for most jobs until very close to the time that you will be ready to begin working. This is the key reason that many students find it difficult to obtain jobs by graduation.

Who Hires? Often when you respond to an advertised job, you are responding to the Human Resources (HR) Department of the organization. Does that department do all the hiring? In general, NO! HR often plays the role of advertising positions, recruiting, screening applicants and referring the top candidates to the department that has the vacancy. The department and, more specifically, the immediate supervisor for the position usually makes the hiring decision. As a job seeker, what this means for you is that although you may be required to apply through HR, it is often to your advantage to also apply directly to the office, department or manager for which you hope to work. Your goal should be to get to the person with the hiring power by HR referral or by direct contact or personal networking. If you apply directly to the hiring department or manager, mention in your cover letter that you have submitted your application through HR as well. A week or two after applying, call and ask if you can set up a time to meet to discuss the position (interview). If that is not possible, ask about the hiring process and the timeline.

TIP: *It is often easier to arrange informational interviews than job interviews. Before you are even seriously looking for a job, this is an excellent way to become visible to an employer of interest as well as to learn about how the hiring process works with that specific employer.*

What do Employers Look for in Candidates? Obviously, different jobs have different requirements—some require specific education or experience—but many employers look for certain characteristics in common. A 2018 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that many employers seek the following:

Communication skills (written)	82.0%
Problem-solving skills	80.9%
Ability to work in a team	78.7%
Initiative	74.2%
Analytical/quantitative skills	71.9%
Strong work ethic	70.8%
Communication skills (verbal)	67.4%
Leadership	67.4%
Detail-oriented	59.6%
Technical skills	59.6%
Flexibility/adaptability	58.4%
Computer skills	55.1%
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)	52.8%
Organizational ability	43.8%
Strategic planning skills	38.2%
Tactfulness	25.8%
Creativity	23.6%
Friendly/outgoing personality	22.5%
Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker	16.9%
Fluency in a foreign language	11.2%

Source: *Job Outlook 2019*, National Association of Colleges and Employers

Focus on your personal strengths and how best to market them to employers.

Where to Look for Jobs. You can search for jobs on many internet job posting sites, but consider how you can target—look for sites with listings for your particular field, industry or geographic location. Often employers narrow their pool by listing only locally or by listing only on sites for their field or where they have had success in the past.

Beyond the internet, often job networking goes on through professional associations, so you may want to consider joining a professional association in your field of interest. By doing so, you could tap into a terrific network of people in your field and also participate in conferences, seminars, meetings and receive newsletters and other written materials related to the field. Other potential sources of job information include your personal network of contacts, local employment commissions, community organizations and agencies, such as the Chamber of Commerce or United Way.

TIP: *Most people get their jobs through personal contact, either by networking their way to employers with hiring power or by cold calling! These methods are at least 4 times more effective than simply applying for jobs on line or by snail mail.*

- HANDOUTS
- FOCUS 2 ASSESSMENT: MAJOR EXPLORATION AND CAREER PLANNING
- WEBSITE LINKS <https://www.lmunet.edu/student-life/career-services/>
- LIBRARY RESOURCES: The LMU Library has a wide variety of books, many available for checkout, that address job search issues.
- CAREER FAIRS & EVENTS: Check out the LMU Office of Career Services' Calendar for these annual events and more. All events are open to students of all majors.
- COUNSELING/JOB SEARCH ADVISING: Finally, you can meet personally with Roger Holtsclaw, MBA, Director of Career Services on an appointment basis to assist with any aspect of the job search, simply call 423-869-7006 or email at roger.holtsclaw@lmunet.edu

Good Luck! Yes, luck plays a part in the job search, too. Be persistent, use all your tools, be confident and you are sure to get lucky!

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