

Graduate Recruitability Tools for Job search and getting into the world of work



**graduate employers
of choice**

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SECTION ONE

CV Writing Tips



Overview



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Section One: CV Writing Tips

A CV (Curriculum Vitae) is a structured summary of your education, skills and experience used to show employers why you're a strong candidate for a specific role.

1. Structure & layout (Make it easy to read)

1

1-2 pages maximum

2

Clear section headings: Education | Experience | Skills | Leadership | Certifications/ Achievements

3

Reverse chronological order (most recent first)

4

Consistent font (no more than 2 font types)

5

Professional email address (no nicknames)

6

Save and submit as PDF (unless told otherwise)

7

Photograph - optional/ on request; it needs to be a professional photo

8

Executive summary - a short statement at the top of your CV that summarises your strengths and career direction

2. What employers actually scan for (in the first 30 seconds)

Recruiters typically scan for:



Relevant qualification



Practical experience (internships, part-time, projects)



Technical skills aligned to role



Evidence of impact



Leadership or initiative



Attention to detail (formatting, spelling & grammar)

3. Turning responsibilities into results

Students often list duties. **Employers want outcomes.**

Instead of	Write
Assisted with research	Conducted statistical analysis on 3 datasets using R, improving reporting accuracy by x%
Tutored students	Tutored 20+ first-year students in calculus, contributing to a x% pass rate

4. Skills section - be specific



AVOID

- Hardworking
- Team player
- Good communicator

Teamwork example:

Partnered with 4 peers on a project, coordinated task allocation and delivered final report on time, achieving X%.

For technical skills include:

- Advanced Excel (PivotTables, VLOOKUP, Macros)
- Python (Pandas, NumPy, Matplotlib)
- Financial modelling
- Data visualisation (Power BI / Tableau)



You can also split it into Technical Skills vs Behavioural strengths/competencies.

Always include an example of how you applied the skill.

5. Common CV mistakes



Generic objective statements



Copy-paste CV for every application



Paragraph blocks instead of bullet points



Including ID number, marital status, or irrelevant personal info



Spelling and grammar errors



Inconsistent fonts, colours and layouts



Your CV should clearly show why you're the right candidate for this role.

BONUS TIP

Not all CV templates are ATS/AI-friendly - complex designs can hide your information from screening systems.

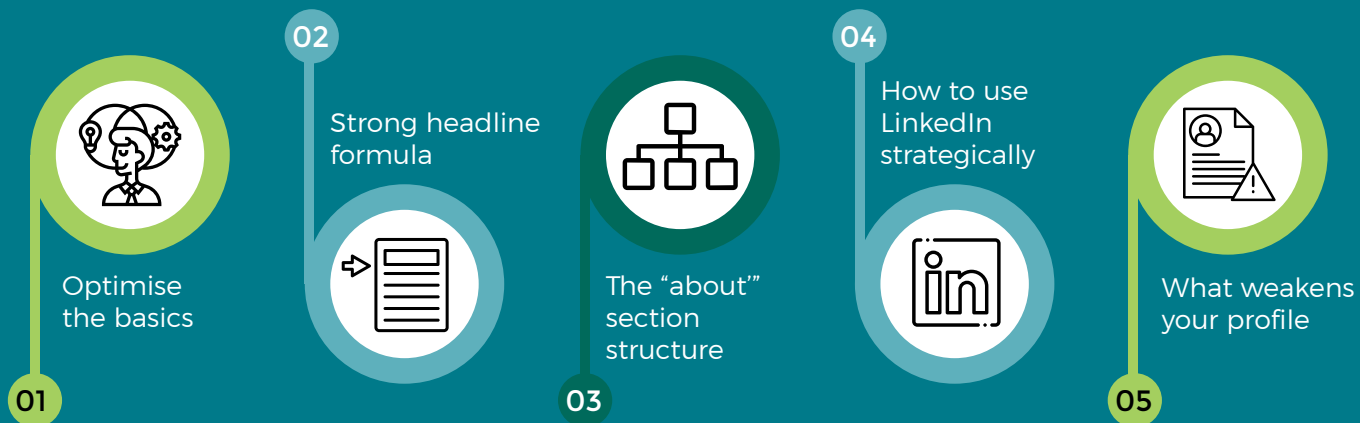


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LinkedIn Tips



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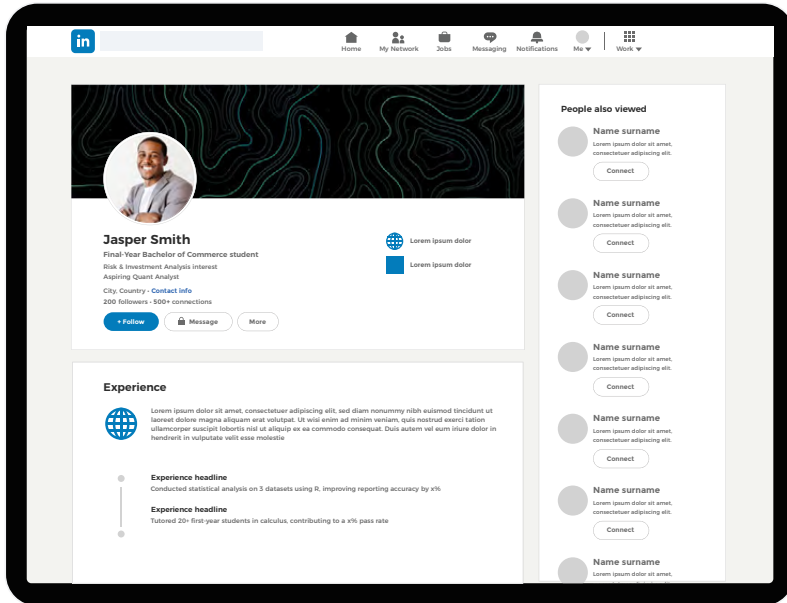
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Section Two: LinkedIn Tips

LinkedIn is a professional networking platform where you build your personal brand and connect with employers.

1. Structure & layout (Make it easy to read)



- 1 Professional headshot (neutral background, clear headshot, not a selfie)
- 2 Headline beyond "Student at..."
- 3 Compelling about section (3-5 short paragraphs)
- 4 Updated qualifications/ year of study
- 5 Updated experience with achievements
- 6 Add skills and request endorsements (where applicable)

2. Strong headline formula

Instead of	Try
BCom Student at X University	Final-Year Bachelor of Commerce student Risk & Investment major Aspiring Quant Analyst <i>(i.e. Current Status + Area of Focus + Career direction)</i>

3. The about section structure



Paragraph 1: Who you are & what you study

Paragraph 2: What skills you are building

Paragraph 3: What opportunities you're exploring and a call to action for the reader

Examples to include



Academic strengths



Key projects

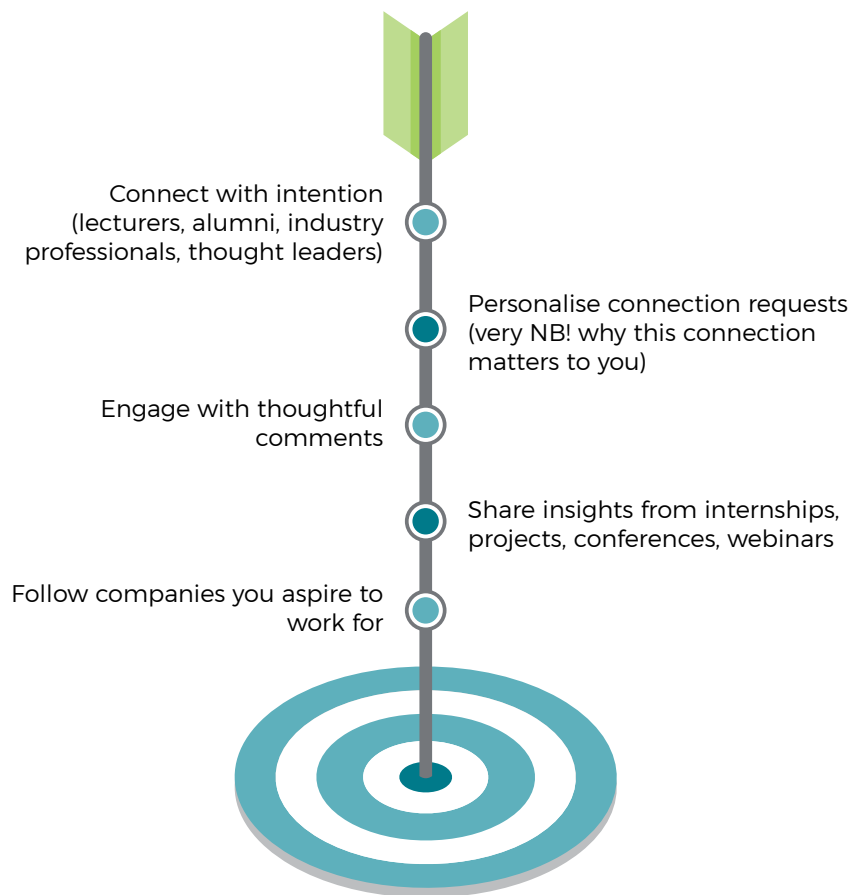


Career interests



Other interests (hobbies/ extra-curricular)

4. How to use LinkedIn strategically



5. What weakens your profile

01	Inactive account for extended periods
02	Casual/ unprofessional photos/ posts
03	Non-work-related content - leave it for other platforms
04	Spelling mistakes
05	Incomplete profile/ missing information
06	"Open to anything" messaging
07	Invitations to connect - not personalised
08	Missing relevant industry keywords - recruiters may not find you



If a recruiter viewed your profile today, would it move you forward or hold you back?



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Interview Preparation



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Section Three: Interview Preparation

An interview is your opportunity to demonstrate how your skills and experiences align with what the employer needs.

1. Preparation framework

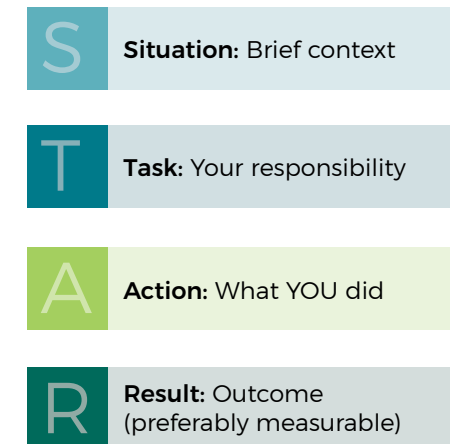
Before the interview, you should know:



Prepare:

- Confirm the venue, directions and timing or test the online platform in advance
- Research your interviewers so you understand their perspective and priorities
- Choose neat and professional clothing (or ask if unsure)
- 3-5 structured examples using the STAR framework
- A clear introduction (30-second summary of who you are)
- 2 thoughtful questions to ask interviewers
- Mock interviews

STAR framework when answering questions:



2. What employers are evaluating

- 1 Communication clarity
- 2 Problem-solving ability
- 3 Self-awareness
- 4 Motivation
- 5 Professionalism
- 6 Alignment with organisational values



What they are asking internally:

"Would this person add value to our team/organisation?"

3. Strong interview behaviours



Listen carefully before answering



Structure responses (STAR framework)



Be aware of your body language



Speak confidently but not rehearsed



Use clear examples, not general statements



Ask clarifying questions if unsure

4. Common interview mistakes

01

Speaking negatively about past experiences

02

Rambling without structure (always use STAR framework)

03

Being unable to explain projects or skills listed on your CV

04

Arriving late (virtual or in-person)

05

Having no questions prepared for recruiters



Preparation builds confidence. Confidence builds credibility. Accept some nerves - the goal isn't zero nerves - it's controlled nerves.

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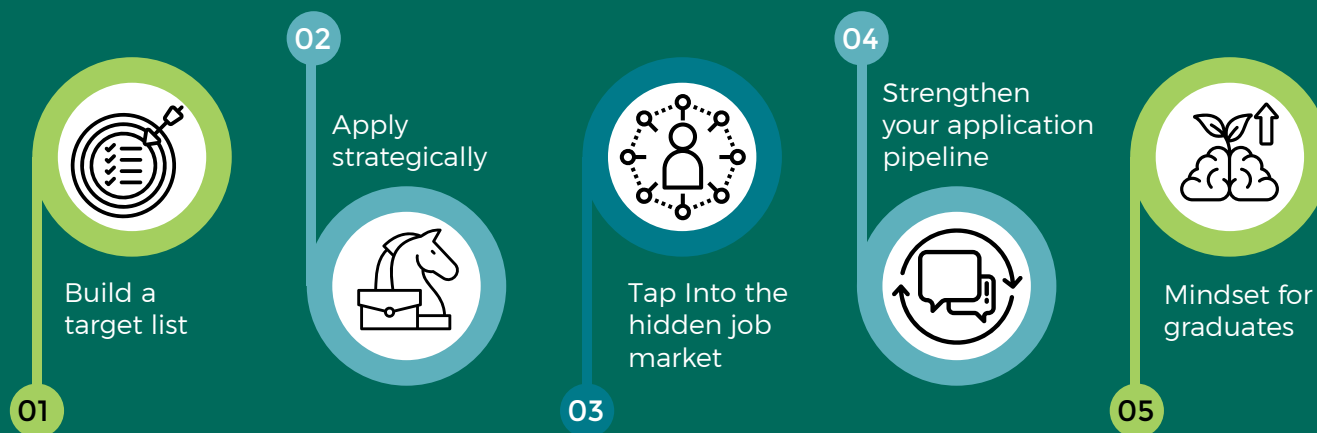


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Job Search Techniques



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Section Four: Job Search Techniques

Turn your job search into a project

1. Build a target list



Research

- 10-20 organisations aligned to your degree (Large, Small and Medium-sized enterprises)
- Consider emerging industries/ start-ups
- Graduate programmes or other suitable entry-level roles



Identify

- Required skills and qualifications
- Recruitment cycles (know when companies actually recruit)
- New and emerging careers/ skills

2. Apply strategically



- 01 Tailor CV for each role
- 02 Include keywords from job description
- 03 Submit before deadline
- 04 Track applications using a spreadsheet or app
- 05 Follow up professionally (if appropriate)

3. Tap Into the hidden job market by using your professional networks



Career chats



Alumni outreach



Industry events
(online & in-person)



LinkedIn
engagement



Referrals



Invest in
continuous
learning

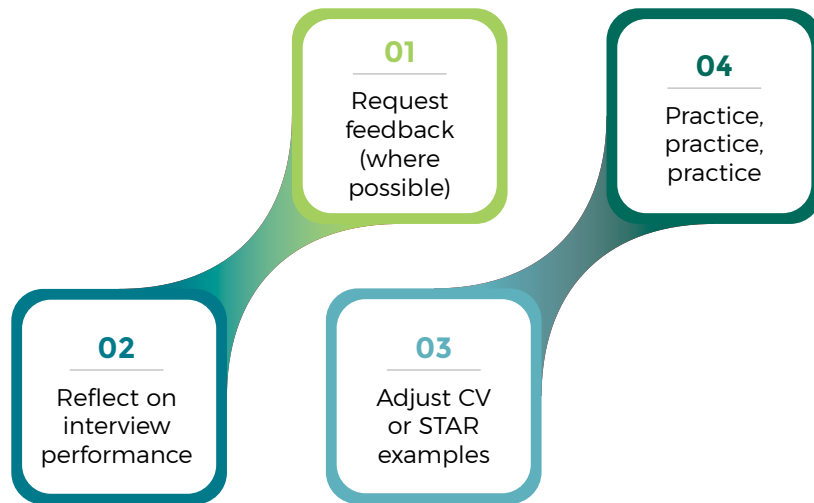


Seek mentorship
opportunities



4. Strengthen your application pipeline

After each rejection:



5. Mindset for graduates

- 1** Rejection is part of the process. Every “no” gets you closer to the right “yes.”
- 2** Consistency matters
- 3** Build essential skills while applying
- 4** Stay visible in your industry



Treat your job search like a project with milestones. Job searching is a process - not a one-time event. Apply. Learn. Adjust. Repeat.

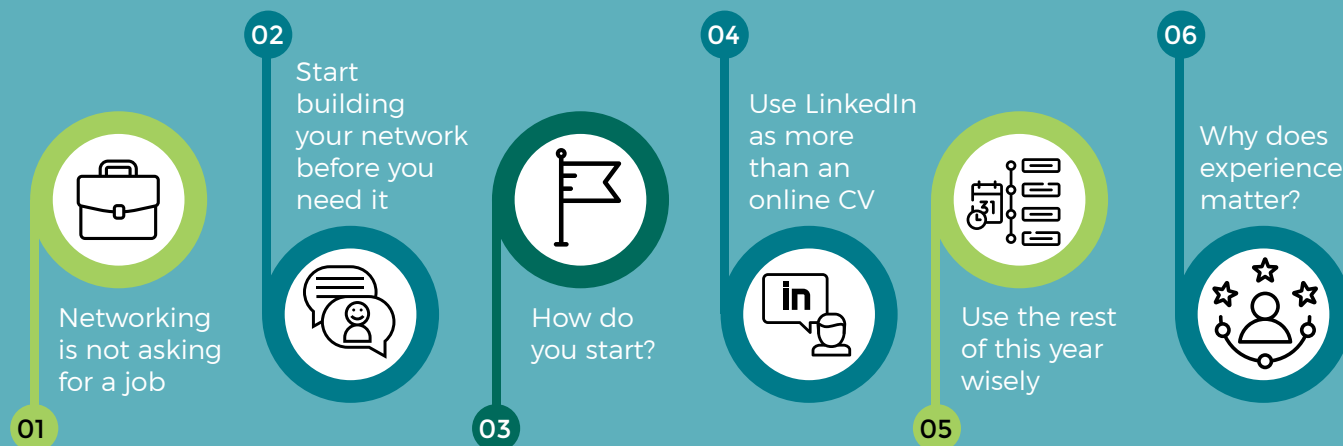


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Build Your Network Before You Need It



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Section Five: Build Your Network Before You Need It

If you're completing your studies soon, you've probably started thinking about your CV, applying for jobs and preparing for interviews. Building and capitalising on your professional network is equally important.

If you are thinking, "I don't know anyone except for my peers," you're not alone.

Many students move away from home to study. Your parents may not have contacts in your chosen industry, and your friends are probably looking for jobs too. The good news is that a professional network isn't something you're born with, it's something you build.

1. Networking is not asking for a job

Let's clear up a common misconception. Networking is not sending a stranger a LinkedIn message saying, "Can you help me find a job?"

Networking is about building genuine professional relationships over time. The stronger your relationships, the more likely people are to think of you when opportunities arise.



2. Start building your network before you need it

Your network should include people who can help you learn, grow and stay informed about opportunities. Start with people you already know:

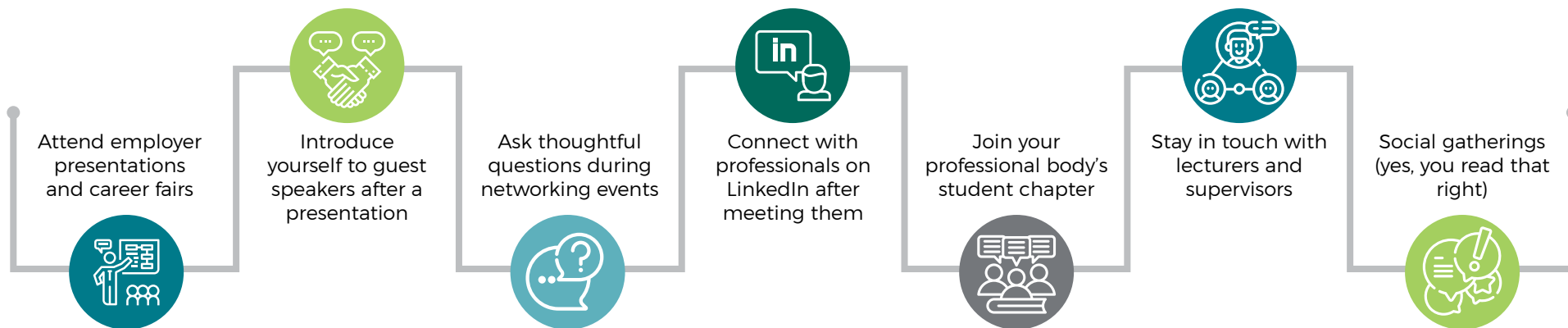
- | | |
|--|---|
| 01 Lecturers and tutors | 05 Guest speakers who visit your department |
| 02 Career practitioners at your university | 06 Recruiters who attend career fairs |
| 03 Supervisors from vacation work or part-time jobs | 07 Professionals working in companies that interest you |
| 04 Alumni from your degree programme | 08 Fellow students (remember, today's classmate could be tomorrow's colleague or manager). |



Don't underestimate the value of these relationships. Many graduate opportunities are shared through conversations long before they're advertised.

3. How do you start?

You don't have to be an extrovert to build a network. Just be consistent! Here are a few simple ways to get started:



When attending a social gathering where you are meeting new people, ask them what they do for a living and how they got there. You'll be surprised what you could learn or how high the chances are of meeting someone that can connect you to an industry-insider. One conversation may not lead to a job. Ten conversations could change your career.

4. Use LinkedIn as more than an online CV

If you have a LinkedIn profile, don't let it gather digital dust.

Think of LinkedIn as your professional reputation before you've even walked into an interview. And please remember that this is not Instagram. People are not interested in what events you are attending, the focus should be on what are you learning, what you've contributed, and your opinion as a professional.



Follow companies you'd like to work for



Connect with professionals in your industry



Comment on posts that interest you



Share your achievements, projects or volunteer experiences



5. Use the rest of this year wisely

If you don't have any work experience yet, ask yourself: "What experience can I gain before graduation?"

Is there a part-time or weekend job near you? Are there some volunteer opportunities in your residence, community, or university? Consider these opportunities:

01

Volunteer for a non-profit organisation.

Job shadow a professional for a day or two.

02

03

Help a small business with administration, marketing or social media.

Tutor school learners or first-year students.

04

05

Become a student assistant or research assistant.

Join or lead a student committee.

06

07

Assist with organising university events.

Complete short courses in skills such as Excel, Power BI, project management or AI tools.

08

Every one of these experiences gives you practical examples to include on your CV and discuss during interviews.

6. Why does experience matter?

Employers aren't only looking for technical knowledge.

They also want evidence that you can:



Communicate professionally



Take responsibility



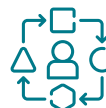
Work with others



Manage your time



Solve problems



Adapt to new situations

The easiest way to demonstrate these skills is by having real examples from work, volunteering, leadership roles or community projects.

Remember this

Your first job may not come from an online application.

It may come from someone remembering your name because you asked a thoughtful question, volunteered on a project, stayed in touch after an event, or impressed them with your attitude.

Small actions taken consistently over the next few months can make a significant difference to your confidence, your CV and your employability.

You don't need hundreds of connections. You just need to become the kind of graduate people remember. Curious. Reliable. Professional. Someone they'd happily recommend when an opportunity comes along.



**Start building your network today.
Start gaining experience today.**

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Your Next Three Career Moves

Reading this article won't build your network; taking action will.

Before you turn the page, **write down three things** you will do in the next month. Keep them realistic and specific.

MY NETWORKING GOAL

Example: *Connect with five alumni from my degree on LinkedIn and start one conversation.*

MY WORK EXPERIENCE GOAL

Example: Apply to volunteer at a local NGO or job shadow someone in my field during the holidays.

MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOAL

Example: Complete an Excel course, attend a career event, or update my LinkedIn profile.



Challenge Yourself

Can you complete all three before the end of the semester? Future you will be glad you started today.



SECTION SIX

Personal Branding



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Section Six: Personal Branding

Who you are, what you bring, and making sure the right people can see it.

Your personal brand is the reputation you build through what you say, what you do, and how consistently you do it. It is the impression people have about you when you are not in the room. Many students move away from home to study. Your parents may not have contacts in your chosen industry, and your friends are probably looking for jobs too. The good news is that a professional network isn't something you're born with, it's something you build.

 What people think it is	 What it actually is
Bragging and self-promotion	Being clear about your value so others can act on it
Having a big digital following	Being known by the right people, even if that is twelve of them
Posting constantly	Showing up consistently, online and in person
Building a polished image	Being consistent about what is already true about you
Best left for extroverts	Something both extroverts and introverts can do well, in their own way. Some build it through visibility and connection, others through depth, consistency and the quality of their work
Becoming someone else	Becoming clearer about who you already are



Every year, roughly 138 applications are received for a single graduate role in South Africa. Your qualification gets you into that pile. **Your personal brand is what moves you further into the recruitment process.**

Why this matters at three different moments:

- Before the job search**
It shapes the choices you make while studying: which societies, vac work, projects and skills you invest your time in.
- During the job search**
It shapes what recruiters learn about you, what your CV and LinkedIn say, and how you show up in the room.
- After you are hired**
It shapes how quickly you are trusted, developed, given opportunities and remembered.

Your personal brand underpins your CV, your LinkedIn, your interview answers, and your job search strategy. If the brand is unclear, all four will be too.

1. Your Inner Brand

Spending some time doing a self-audit sets the foundation for an impactful personal brand.

Most graduates skip this step because it feels less urgent than a CV template. Then they sit in an interview and cannot answer "tell me about yourself" with anything convincing, because they have never done the work of deciding what is true about them. **Here are 4 ways to do a self-audit:**



01 Clarify your values

Values are what you consider important and what you keep choosing to live by. They are the things that make work feel worth doing, and when ignored, quietly wear you down. Below are examples of values:



Safety and security

Stability, responsibility, trust



Connection and belonging

Empathy, compassion, respect, community



Self-respect and esteem

Integrity, achievement, confidence, recognition



Growth and development

Curiosity, resilience, adaptability, mastery



Fulfilment and self-actualisation

Authenticity, purpose, creativity, meaning



Social justice and contribution

Fairness, sustainability, advocacy



Work and professionalism

Competence, leadership, accountability, discipline



Wellbeing and balance

Health, balance, reflection

YOUR VALUES DO THREE DIFFERENT JOBS.

They tell you what to aim for. Before you apply anywhere, your values narrow the field. They help you work out which sectors, organisations and roles are likely to suit you, and which will exhaust you no matter how good the package is.

They give you language. In interviews you will be asked what motivates you, why this organisation, and what kind of environment brings out your best work. Values are what turn those from difficult questions into easy ones.

They help you determine your red flags. A value mismatch is one of the most common reasons graduates leave a first job within the first year or two.



Do this: Choose your top five values from the examples column, then narrow to three. For each one, write down a specific time you demonstrated it. A value you cannot evidence is simply a word, not a value. Interviewers can tell the difference.



02 Identify your signature strengths

Ask yourself, and then ask three people who know you well:

- What three words would those closest to me use to describe me?
- What do my friends and classmates depend on me for?
- What do I do easily that others struggle with or avoid?
- What am I known for?
- What strength am I not acknowledging?

That last question matters most. Students and graduates often overlook their most obvious strengths as “just something I do.”



03 Get clear on your goals

Where do you want to be in two years? What do you want to learn on the way? What kind of environment do you believe brings out your best work?

You do not need certainty. You need direction. “I am exploring risk and investment analysis and building my modelling skills” is a strong brand message. “I am open to anything” is not.



04 Check your inner narrative

Your brand is limited by the story you tell yourself before anyone else hears it. Take a moment to reflect on your mindset.

Fixed mindset says

I am not confident

I am not good at networking

I am bad at interviews

Growth mindset says

I can learn to speak with more confidence

I am still learning how to show up more visibly

I have not practiced interviews enough yet

What limiting beliefs might prevent your ability to show up meaningfully? When you notice yourself thinking with a fixed mindset about yourself and your potential, consider how you might reframe your thoughts using a growth mindset. Creating a meaningful personal brand requires continuous work on your mindset.

This self-audit is the work most graduates skip. It is also the reason confident candidates sound confident.

2. Your Story

Your story is how you turn what you know about yourself into something someone else can learn from and act on.

"The process of personal branding involves finding your uniqueness, building a reputation on the things you want to be known for, and then allowing yourself to be known for them." **Michael Stelzner**



01 Build your personal brand statement

Your full statement covers five things:



Where you have been and what you have learnt



Your strengths, skills and unique value



Your achievements and proudest moments



Your interests, values and motivators



Where you want to go next



Use it for self-reflection, career conversations, and comprehensive introductions.



02 Cut it down to 30 seconds

The short version is what you use at a career fair, in the first minute of an interview, or when someone asks what you do.



Formula: Who you are + what you study + what you are strong at (with evidence) + what you are moving towards.



Instead of

"I'm a BCom student, I'm hardworking and a fast learner."

"I'm doing my engineering degree and looking for opportunities."



Try

"I'm a final-year BCom student majoring in risk and investment. I tutored 20 first-year students in statistics last year, which is where I found I'm good at making complex things simple. I'm moving towards quantitative analysis."

"I'm a third-year mechanical engineering student. I led the design team for our final-year vehicle project and handled supplier negotiations. I'm looking for a graduate programme in manufacturing."



03 Build a story when you have no formal work experience

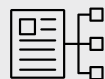
Most graduates believe they have nothing to talk about. They are usually wrong. Employers are looking for evidence of capability, not only evidence of employment.

- Academic projects, research, group work and presentations
- Tutoring, mentoring, demonstrating or peer support
- SRC, societies, student leadership
- Sport, team management, fixtures organising
- Church, community and volunteer roles
- A side hustle: braiding, baking, reselling, photography, tech repairs, event promotion
- Working in a family business or spaza
- Holiday and vacation work, retail, waitering, call centre
- Caring responsibilities that required you to manage time, money and people
- Self-taught skills: a language, Excel, a design tool, coding



04 Own your setback narrative

A gap year, a repeated year, a changed degree, a period of illness or a family crisis is not a hole in your brand. It becomes one only when you cannot talk about it.



Structure: What happened, briefly and without apology. What you did about it. What you learnt or built as a result.



Instead of

"I failed second year, it was a bad time, I'd rather not go into it."



Try

"I repeated my second year. I had been studying the way I studied at secondary school and it didn't scale. I changed how I work, joined a study group and passed with a much stronger average. It's the reason I now ask for feedback early rather than late."



Do not overshare hardship in a way that positions you as a risk. Share it in a way that positions you as someone who has resilience.



05 Be honest about what you can deliver

There is a line between marketing yourself well and selling a version of yourself you cannot live up to. Cross it and you will be found out, either in the interview when you cannot explain something on your own CV, or in month two of the job when the gap becomes visible.

3. Your Professional Community

Many opportunities and experiences open up in your professional community. Personal branding involves reflecting on who is in your network, establishing new professional relationships and leveraging those connections for your ongoing development.



01 Map your network



Do this: Write down every name you can think of in each row. Most students are shocked by how many they already have. Then identify people that you could be more intentional about building professional connections with.



02 Understand that your reputation is already forming

Your lecturers, tutors and supervisors are your first professional references. Long before you write a CV, you are building a reputation for whether you meet deadlines, whether you contribute to group work, and whether you can be relied on.

Your classmates are your future industry network. The person next to you in a lecture might be at a firm you want to join in three years.

This is the cheapest brand-building available to you, and it is happening whether you manage it or not.



03 Show up where the people are

Most of below are free and already available on your campus:

- Career fairs
- Campus employer presentations
- Society events
- Industry webinars
- University career services workshops
- Professional body student chapters
- Hackathons
- Case competitions

At a career fair: Introduce yourself using your 30-second version if the situation allows, or keep it brief and ask one meaningful question, and get a name so you can follow up within 48 hours.



Bonus Tip: Networking is not asking strangers for favours. It is building genuine relationships over time with people who work in the field you care about. Start before you need anything.



04 Reach out with intention

Personalise every online connection request. Express why you are reaching out to them specifically.



Be specific and brief. Respect that they are busy.



Ask for insight, not a job. *"Could I ask you two questions about how you moved into consulting?"* gets answered. *"Please send me vacancies"* does not.



Follow up with thanks and tell them later what you did with their advice. This is what turns a contact into an advocate.

4. How You Show Up

Your brand is not what you decide it is. It is the sum of every touchpoint.



01 Know your touchpoints



CV and cover letter



LinkedIn



Email and written communication



Social media



Career fairs and events



Interviews



Group assessments and assessment centres



How you behave in lectures and group projects



How you follow up



02 Run the consistency test

Open your CV, your LinkedIn profile, and then say your 30-second introduction out loud.



Ask: Would someone who read/heard all three describe you the same way?

Consistency demonstrates credibility and reinforces your brand.



03 Get the basics right

Touchpoint	The standard
Email address	Your name. Not a nickname, not a birth year, not anything you chose when you were 15
Email signature	Full name, qualification and year, contact number, LinkedIn URL
Response time	Reply to recruiters within 24 hours
Voice notes	Do not send them to a recruiter. Type a message professionally
Voicemail	Set it up, with a professional greeting. Answer unknown numbers professionally during a job search
Documents	Named properly. "Nomsa_Dlamini_CV.pdf" not "CV final final 2.pdf"
Photograph	Neutral background, good natural light, clear face, no filters. A phone camera and a friend are enough.



04 Show up intentionally

1

Arrive early, whether virtual or in person.

2

Be professional with everyone, not just the interviewer. Receptionists and assistants are frequently asked what they thought about a potential candidate.

3

In group assessments, resist the urge to dominate. Assessors are watching whether you bring others in.

4

Listen fully before answering.

5

Manage your body language: posture, eye contact, hands.



05 Be authentic

Many students and graduates carry a specific pressure: the sense that being professional means sounding like someone else. Flattening your accent. Shortening your name because you assume it is too much effort for someone. Hiding where you grew up, what languages you speak, what you had to do to get here.



Adapting your communication for context is a professional skill.

Shifting your communication style in a client presentation from how you speak with your friends is code-switching, and it is a legitimate tool.



Erasing yourself is not the same thing, and it costs you.

It is exhausting to maintain. It flattens the exact things that make you distinctive. Being multilingual, having cultural fluency, resilience, and the ability to move between very different worlds are commercially valuable, not something to apologise for.



Remember: Adapt your communication style, not your identity.

5. Your digital footprint in the AI era

If a recruiter searched your name today, would it move you forward or hold you back?



01 Google yourself

Search your full name first, then search your full name plus your university. For both, view the search results and images.



Are you happy with what comes up?



Is there anything that contradicts the brand you are building?



02 Audit the formal profiles

LinkedIn and any professional portfolio. Covered in detail in the LinkedIn section of the recruitability guide.



03 Audit your informal footprint

Students protect LinkedIn and forget everything else.

 Platform	 What to check
WhatsApp	Your display photo, your “about” line and your status updates. Recruiters have your number once you apply for a job and can see this information.
X	Old posts. Search your own handle for content you would not want an employer to see
TikTok	Is it public? Would you be comfortable with a hiring manager watching your videos?
Instagram and Facebook	Photos you are tagged in, not just the ones you posted. Check your tagged tab
Group chats	Screenshots travel. Assume anything you write could be read by someone you have not met



Your options: delete what does not serve you, tighten your privacy settings, or keep it public and own it.



04 Build a positive footprint



Post about a project, a conference, a webinar, a book or a module that changed how you think



Comment thoughtfully on posts by people in your industry. Consistent thoughtful comments get you noticed faster than posting for the sake of posting



Share what you are learning, not just what you have achieved



Write one post about your academic, extracurricular or career journey and what you are working towards

You do not need to post weekly. You need a footprint that shows a person who is engaged with their field.



05 Understand what AI has changed

Most graduates now have access to AI tools that write a polished CV, a fluent cover letter and a professional-sounding LinkedIn summary.

Employers know applications are AI-assisted, so they probe harder. Anything you cannot explain in your own words becomes a credibility problem rather than a strength.



Use AI to

Structure and tighten what you have written

Check grammar, spelling and tone

Prepare for interviews by practising questions

Research an industry, a company or a role



Do not use AI to

Invent experience you do not have

Generate values and strengths you have not thought about

Write in a voice that is not yours

Produce a story you cannot defend out loud



The real test: could you defend it, in your own words, in an interview?

6. Common personal branding mistakes to avoid

1

Overselling beyond what you can deliver. Claiming skills you cannot demonstrate.

2

Being vague. Vagueness wastes the opportunity to show your actual value.

3

Skipping the inner audit. Those who have not done the self-awareness work cannot articulate their value under pressure, so they either inflate the truth or go blank.

4

Copying someone else's voice. Borrowing a LinkedIn influencer's tone or a template personal statement. It is obvious, and it erases the only thing you actually own.

5

Inconsistency across platforms. A CV, a LinkedIn and an interview answer that tell three different stories.

6

Neglecting the informal footprint. A polished LinkedIn and a public account full of content you would not want a hiring manager to see.

7. Your brand after the offer

The reputation you build in your first 90 days lays the foundation for your personal brand at work. It is formed fast, by people who do not know you yet, and it is hard to change later.



01 Stop performing perfection

The most common graduate mistake is trying to look like someone who already knows everything. It leads to hiding confusion, guessing rather than asking, and avoiding anything you might not be immediately good at.

 Instead of	 Try
Nodding through an instruction you did not understand	"Can I check I've understood? You want X by Thursday, in this format?"
Hiding a mistake	Flagging it early, with a proposed fix
Waiting to be told what to do	"I've finished that. What would be most useful next?"
Avoiding unfamiliar tasks	"I haven't done that before. I'd like to try it if someone can review my first attempt"



Nobody expects a graduate to know. They expect a graduate to learn.



02 Build a brand around curiosity, not certainty

The values that serve graduates best in the first year are curiosity, openness to feedback, reliability and a willingness to learn in public. These are the things senior people remember and recommend you for.



Ask good questions. Take notes. Follow up on advice and tell people what you did with it.



03 Deal with the fear of being seen

Many graduates spend their first months silent in meetings. Afraid to present. Afraid to share an idea in case it is wrong. Afraid that speaking up will expose them.

The cost is invisibility, and invisible people do not get developed. Practical ways to start:



Prepare one question or comment before a meeting so you are not improvising



Ask a clarifying question. It is the lowest-risk contribution and it is genuinely useful



Volunteer for the small presentation before you are asked to do the big one



Say "I'm not sure, but here's my thinking." It is a legitimate professional sentence



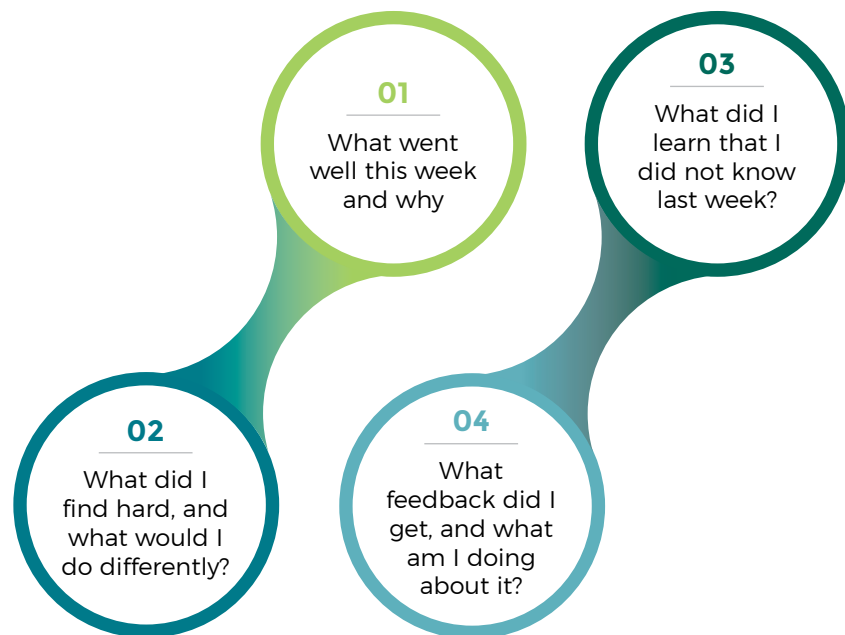
Self-doubt is normal. Letting it determine your visibility is a choice.



04 Practice self-reflection deliberately

Graduates who reflect develop faster than graduates who don't carve out the time. Reflection is what turns experience into growth and capability.

A simple weekly habit, 10 minutes:



Keep a running record of your wins, projects and numbers.

You will need it for your first performance review, your next CV and every future interview. Nobody else is keeping it for you.



05 Learn to advocate for yourself internally

Doing good work quietly is not enough. Your work needs to be known.



Visible: make your contributions known, without claiming other people's



Impactful: connect what you did to a business outcome



Value-driven: align your work with what your team cares about



Opportunity-focused: say out loud what you want to learn and do next



06 Keep the external brand alive

- Update LinkedIn with your new role.
- Stay connected to your university network and career services.
- Stay in touch with the people who helped you get there and tell them it worked.
- Become the alumnus who takes the call from a student.

Your 7-day personal branding challenge

DAY 1	Complete your values and strengths audit. Ask three people for three words
DAY 2	Write your personal brand statement and cut it to a 30-second version
DAY 3	Google yourself and audit every social platform, including WhatsApp
DAY 4	Update your LinkedIn headline, about section and photo
DAY 5	Say your 30-second introduction out loud to three different people and adjust it
DAY 6	Map your network and send five personalised connection requests
DAY 7	Write one thoughtful post about what you are learning or working towards



Remember: Your qualification says what you studied. Your personal brand says who you are, what you bring, and where you are going.

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SECTION SEVEN

Dealing with rejection



Overview



Section Seven: Dealing with rejection - It happens to almost everyone

Let's start with something that many graduates don't hear often enough: rejection is a normal part of the graduate recruitment process.

SAGEA's Candidate Insights and Employer Benchmarking research consistently shows just how competitive graduate recruitment has become. **Employers receive a median of 3,200 applications, with an average of 116 applications for every graduate vacancy.** Unsurprisingly, only around one in eight applicants will progress to the next stage of the recruitment process.

That means many capable, motivated graduates will receive rejection emails -not because they lack potential, but simply because there are far more applicants than opportunities.

1. Don't take it personally

It's easy to assume that a rejection means you're "not good enough." In reality, employers make decisions based on a wide range of factors, including the specific skills they need, team fit, business requirements and the strength of the overall applicant pool.

A "no" simply means that particular opportunity wasn't the one for you

Instead of viewing rejection as failure, view it as part of the process. Every graduate who has successfully secured a position has almost certainly faced rejection along the way. The average number of applications made by candidates who completed our research is nine, and most received only one or two offers.

2. Learn from every application - no matter what stage you reach

Rather than moving straight on to the next application, take a moment to reflect. Ask yourself:

- 1 Did I tailor my CV to the role?
- 2 Did I prepare thoroughly for the interview?
- 3 Were there questions I struggled to answer?
- 4 Are there technical or behavioural skills I could strengthen?
- 5 Did I research the organisation and understand what they were looking for?

If you receive feedback from an employer, use it constructively. If no feedback is provided, take a few moments to reflect on what you could do differently next time.



Every application is an opportunity to learn, grow and improve.

3. Keep organised

Applying for graduate programmes can quickly become overwhelming, particularly if you're applying to multiple employers at the same time. Keeping track of your applications will help you stay organised, meet deadlines and prepare effectively for each stage of an employer's recruitment process.



Consider **creating a simple spreadsheet** or using a job application tracker to record.

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| ✓ Employer name | ✓ Closing date | ✓ Outcome |
| ✓ Graduate programme | ✓ Assessment completed | ✓ Feedback received (if any) |
| ✓ Date applied | ✓ Interview dates | ✓ Next steps |

Over time, your tracker can help you identify patterns. Perhaps you're consistently progressing to interviews but not receiving offers, suggesting you may need to strengthen your interview preparation. Or perhaps you're not making it past the initial screening, indicating that your CV or application could be improved.

Think of your application tracker as more than just a checklist - it's a tool for continuous improvement.



Top Tip: Record the reason for each rejection wherever possible. Whether it's an online assessment, interview performance or lack of relevant experience, identifying patterns can help you focus your development and improve your chances of future success.

4. Keep building your experience

While you're applying, continue investing in yourself.

This could include:



Completing short online courses



Volunteering or freelancing



Participating in hackathons, competitions or case challenges



Taking on leadership roles on campus; (class representative, residence mentor, orientation (O-Week) mentor, tutor, peer mentor or student society committee member)



Networking with professionals



Gaining practical experience through internships or vacation work

Every experience strengthens your CV and provides valuable examples to draw on during interviews.

5. Keep applying strategically

Don't let rejection destroy your hope and confidence – stay committed to your job search and keep networking.



In fact, SAGEA's Candidate Insights research found that:

Graduates who successfully secured employment made an average of **nine applications** before receiving an offer.

1

Rather than applying for every opportunity you find, focus on graduate programmes/ entry-level roles that genuinely align with your qualifications, skills and career aspirations.

2

Tailor your CV, customise your application and prepare thoroughly for each opportunity.

3

A smaller number of well-prepared applications is often far more effective than sending the same application to dozens of employers.

6. Start early

One of the clearest findings from SAGEA's Candidate Insights research is that graduates who began exploring careers and applying for opportunities during their first year of university were significantly more likely to secure a position with one of their preferred employers than those who waited until their final year.

Even if you're not yet ready to apply, you can start building your career readiness by attending employer presentations, networking events and career fairs, creating your LinkedIn profile, gaining work experience and researching graduate programmes.

The earlier you start preparing, the more confident and competitive you'll be when applications open.



Remember: it only takes one employer to get your first "yes"!

Graduate recruitment is competitive, and rejection is part of almost every successful graduate's journey.

The employer who eventually hires you won't know how many rejection emails you received. They'll remember that you were prepared, resilient, professional and ready to contribute.



Stay focused. Keep learning. Keep improving. Keep applying.
Your next application could be the one that launches your career.

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