A GUIDE AND WORKBOOK FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

HOW TO CONDUCT A FIRST TIME JOB SEARCH

Six stages, step by step, with AI practices that keep you in the driver's seat and your story at the center.



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Includes a fillable workbook and two AI template prompts

WHEREVER YOU ARE STARTING FROM, THIS GUIDE WAS BUILT FOR YOU.

A first job search can feel like a test you never got the study guide for. Some of you are the first in your family to do this. Some of you are working, caring for family, or carrying more than anyone around you knows. All of that experience counts, and all of it can become part of your story. This guide breaks the search into six stages so you can move one clear step at a time, whether you are looking for an internship, a part time or campus job, or your first full time role.

You set the pace

There is no single timeline. Move through the stages in order, or start wherever you feel most ready. Rest is part of the plan.

Your story is an asset

Part time jobs, caregiving, athletics, faith communities, class projects, and side work all build real skills employers value.

A "no" is information

Rejection is a normal part of every search. It reflects fit and timing, not your worth as a person.

You are the driver

AI is your GPS. It can suggest routes, brainstorm, organize, and help you practice. You are always the driver: you make every decision, and you can defend every word you send.

How this guide works

- **Your Turn.** After each stage, a workbook page helps you put the ideas into action. Type directly into the fields on screen, or print and write by hand.
- **GPS Prompt.** A ready to use prompt for any AI tool you choose. Read the privacy page before you start.
- **Pause point.** A moment to breathe, check in with yourself, and remember what is in your control.

INSIDE

3. Start Here
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START HERE

TWO WAYS TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to be worked through with a career coach, advisor, or mentor, one stage at a time. It also works on your own. Either way, you decide where to begin and how fast to move.

Working with a coach

A suggested rhythm of six sessions, 45 to 60 minutes each:

Session 1. Start Here, the Map, Stage 1, and Workbook 1

Session 2. Stage 2, the internships spotlight, and Workbook 2

Session 3. Stage 3, the worked example, and Workbook 3

Session 4. Stage 4, Workbook 4, and the Career Fair Playbook

Session 5. Stage 5, Workbook 5, and the privacy page

Session 6. Stage 6, Workbook 6, and a weekly check in

Complete the workbook page between sessions, then bring it back to talk through together.

Short on time? A 20 minute start

1. Check your top three values (Workbook 1).
2. Write three job titles you are curious about (Workbook 2).
3. Describe one experience in your own words (Workbook 3).
4. Write down five people you could talk with (Workbook 4).
5. Choose one small action for this week and put it on your calendar.

That is a real start. You can return for the rest whenever you are ready.

A NOTE FOR COACHES AND MENTORS

Many students carry experiences that make evaluation feel risky. Invite rather than require: ask permission before exploring past jobs or hard seasons, let the student choose which examples to share, and treat every workbook answer as a draft. Start with the stage that feels most useful to the student, even if it is not Stage 1. Celebrate effort and progress, not only outcomes.

What you will need

A device or a printout

Type into the fields on a computer, or print the workbook pages and write by hand. Download the file before you type so your answers save.

What you already have

A resume draft, class projects, job descriptions from past work, or nothing at all. Every starting point works.

Small blocks of time

Plan about 30 to 60 minutes per stage. Short, steady sessions work better than one exhausting marathon.

YOUR JOB SEARCH MAP

Think of your search as a path with six stages. Each stage builds on the one before it, and you will often loop back. When you learn something in an interview, you might update your resume. When a networking conversation sparks a new idea, you might explore a new job title. That looping is a sign of growth, not a sign you are behind.

1

Know Yourself

Name your values, strengths, and skills, and translate every experience you have into language employers recognize.

2

Explore and Target

Turn your interests into real job titles, find where those jobs live, and build a list of organizations you want to know.

3

Build Your Materials

Draft your resume in your own voice, refine it with care, and shape a cover letter and LinkedIn profile that sound like you.

4

Grow Your Network

Map the people you already know, reach out with short and genuine messages, and learn from conversations.

5

Apply With Intention

Apply to roles that fit, tailor each application honestly, and track everything in one place.

6

Interview and Decide

Prepare your stories, practice out loud, follow up with gratitude, and weigh offers against what matters to you.

RUNNING THROUGH EVERY STAGE: CARE FOR YOURSELF

A sustainable search beats a frantic one. Page 21 helps you build a weekly rhythm that protects your energy, your classes, and your relationships. Spotlight pages on internships, a worked example, and career fairs sit alongside the stages.

01

STAGE 1 OF 6

Know Yourself

Employers hire people who can clearly explain what they bring. Knowing your values, strengths, and skills makes every later stage easier, from choosing roles to answering interview questions.

1. **Name what matters to you.** Values are the things that make a workplace feel right: stability, flexibility, mission, pay, growth, a supportive team. Knowing yours helps you choose, not just get chosen.
2. **Gather all of your experience.** Every part counts: part time jobs, class projects, caregiving, volunteering, athletics, student organizations, military service, faith or community roles, and side work.
3. **Translate experience into skills.** Ask yourself what each experience required of you. Working a register during a rush shows accuracy under pressure and customer service. Caring for younger siblings shows scheduling, responsibility, and problem solving.
4. **Spot your strengths.** Think about what people thank you for, what you do without being asked, and what feels energizing rather than draining.
5. **Know your needs.** Write down your real requirements: the pay you need, your commute limits, schedule, and anything else that is not up for debate. These are valid, and they will guide your choices.

WHAT I DID	SKILLS IT SHOWS
Closed the store three nights a week	Trustworthiness, cash handling, following procedures, working independently
Led my team's group project when a member dropped out	Leadership, adaptability, project planning, communication
Helped my parents with forms and appointments in English	Translation, advocacy, attention to detail, cross cultural communication

GPS PROMPT: Try This with AI

Write about one experience in your own words first. Then ask AI to help you name the skills, and keep only the ones that are true for you.

Try this: *Here is something I did, described in my own words: [paste]. What transferable skills does this show? Use plain language, explain each skill in one sentence, and do not invent anything I did not say.*

Pause point. Reflecting on the past can bring up hard memories. You can skip any question and come back later. You decide what to share, and with whom.

FREE TOOL: THE O*NET INTEREST PROFILER

The O*NET Interest Profiler on My Next Move (mynextmove.org) is a free career exploration tool sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. You answer 30 short questions about work activities you might enjoy, and it suggests careers that match your interests and your level of experience (National Center for O*NET Development, n.d.-a).

1. Take the Interest Profiler and write down your top two or three interest areas.

2. Open a few suggested careers and read what people in them do each day and which skills they use.

3. On each career page, follow the link to CareerOneStop to see live job openings near you, along with apprenticeships where they exist.

Treat your results as ideas to explore, not a label. You will carry them into Stage 2.

MY TOP INTEREST AREAS	CAREERS I WANT TO EXPLORE

MY SELF INVENTORY

Start with what you already have. There are no wrong answers here, only honest ones.

1. Values that matter to me

- ☐ Stability
- ☐ Flexibility
- ☐ Helping others
- ☐ Pay and benefits
- ☐ Growth and learning
- ☐ Creativity
- ☐ Teamwork
- ☐ Independence
- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Mission and purpose
- ☐ Work and life balance
- ☐ Recognition

MY TOP THREE VALUES, IN ORDER

WHY THESE MATTER TO ME

2. Experience to skills translator

EXPERIENCE	WHAT I DID, IN MY OWN WORDS	SKILLS IT SHOWS

3. My strengths and needs

THREE STRENGTHS PEOPLE NOTICE IN ME

MY NEEDS

Pay

Place

Other

STAGE 2 OF 6

02 Explore and Target

Interests become a search when you can name real job titles and real organizations. This stage turns "I am not sure what I want" into a focused, flexible starting list.

1. **Turn interests into job titles.** Start with the careers your Interest Profiler suggested in Stage 1, then look them up on O*NET OnLine (onetonline.org) to see daily tasks, related titles, and the skills each role uses. Then search a title and read several postings to learn the language employers use.
2. **Look in more than one place.** Try your campus career center's job platform, company career pages, LinkedIn, Indeed, CareerOneStop's Job Finder (careeronestop.org), professional associations in your field, and your local workforce board.
3. **Build a target employer list.** Choose 10 to 15 organizations you would be glad to work for, including ones with no posting right now. Many roles are filled through relationships, so knowing who you want to meet matters.
4. **Read postings with care.** Separate what is required from what is preferred. If you meet the core qualifications and can learn the rest, give yourself permission to apply.
5. **Protect yourself from scams.** Never pay to apply. Be cautious of offers made without an interview, interviews held only by text, requests for bank details before a written offer, and recruiters using personal email addresses. Verify any role on the company's official website (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.).

GPS PROMPT: Try This with AI

Use AI to widen your list of possibilities, then confirm every title is real and fits you.

Try this: *I am a [year] student studying [major] and I am interested in [interests]. Suggest 10 entry level job titles I could search for, with one plain sentence about what each job does. Mark any title you are not confident is a common real job title.*

Then check each suggestion on O*NET OnLine or in real job postings. AI can sound confident and still be wrong about titles, companies, and salaries.

Pause point. Too many options can feel heavy. Choose two or three titles to start. You can widen your search later, and that is a strategy, not a setback.

SPOTLIGHT

INTERNSHIPS, PART TIME JOBS, AND CAMPUS ROLES

Your first search may not be for a full time job, and that is a smart place to begin. Internships, part time work, and campus roles build skills, references, and confidence. Every stage in this guide applies to them, with a few adjustments.

Internships

Short term roles, often during summer or a semester, built around learning. Ask whether the role is paid and whether you can earn academic credit through your department. Some employers recruit months ahead, so check deadlines early.

Part time jobs

Retail, food service, childcare, and office work build customer service, reliability, and teamwork. They belong on your resume, and they count as real experience.

Campus jobs

Libraries, recreation centers, residence life, admissions, and academic departments hire students and often work around class schedules. If your financial aid includes Federal Work Study, ask your financial aid office how to find eligible jobs.

Other ways to gain experience

Research with a professor, volunteer leadership, co-op programs, apprenticeships, short project based work, and student organization roles all build experience you can talk about.

How each stage adapts

STAGE	THE INTERNSHIP AND PART TIME TWIST
1. Know Yourself	Ask what you want to learn and how many hours you can work around classes, family, and other jobs.
2. Explore and Target	Search your field plus "intern," "student," or "part time," and write down each application deadline.
3. Build Your Materials	Education, coursework, and projects carry more weight. Put them where an employer will see them quickly.
4. Grow Your Network	Ask professors, advisors, and older students where past interns have worked.
5. Apply With Intention	Apply early, track deadlines, and keep a few options in progress at once.
6. Interview and Decide	Emphasize curiosity, reliability, and willingness to learn. Compare hours, pay, and learning, not only titles.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU ACCEPT

1. Is the role paid, and how much?
2. How many hours each week, and is the schedule flexible during exams?
3. Is it in person, hybrid, or remote?
4. Who will supervise and mentor me?
5. What projects will I work on?
6. Can I earn academic credit?
7. Have past interns been offered further roles?

MY TARGET LIST

Focus first, then expand. This page becomes the backbone of your search.

1. Job titles I will search

JOB TITLE	WHY IT FITS ME	WHERE I VERIFIED IT

2. Organizations I want to know

ORGANIZATION	WHY I AM INTERESTED	OPEN ROLE?	PERSON I KNOW THERE

3. Keywords I keep seeing

SKILLS, TOOLS, AND PHRASES REPEATED ACROSS POSTINGS

4. Where I will search

- [ ] Campus career center platform
- [ ] Company career pages
- [ ] LinkedIn
- [ ] Indeed
- [ ] CareerOneStop Job Finder
- [ ] Professional association job board

STAGE 3 OF 6

03 Build Your Materials

Your resume, cover letter, and LinkedIn profile should sound like the person who shows up to the interview. Draft in your own words first. Refine second.

The human first resume method

1. **Start with headings only.** Contact, Education, Skills, Projects, Experience, Leadership and Involvement. Recruiters often tell career coaches they want Skills and Projects near the top, so they know what to look for as they read your experience.
2. **Explain each role in your own words.** Say it out loud or write a few sentences: what you did, who you helped, and what changed because you were there.
3. **Shape your words into bullets.** Use this formula: action verb, plus what you did, plus the result or scale. "Trained 4 new hires on opening procedures, cutting setup time by about 15 minutes" tells a clear story.
4. **Do the ruthless edit.** Print your draft, grab a pen, and cross out every word you would not say in a real conversation. What remains is clear, confident, and yours.
5. **Tailor for each role.** Mirror the posting's keywords where they honestly describe your experience. Keep it to one page and save it as a PDF named FirstName_LastName_Resume.

Cover letter in three moves

1. **Why them.** One specific reason this organization matters to you.
2. **What you bring.** One short story that shows a skill they asked for.
3. **Next step.** Thank them and invite a conversation.

LinkedIn basics

A clear photo, a headline that names who you are and where you are headed, an About section written in first person, your skills, and your experiences. Your voice here should match your resume.

GPS PROMPT: Try This with AI

Once your draft is written, AI can help you sharpen it. You stay the editor.

Try this: *Here is one of my resume bullets: [bullet]. Here is the job posting: [paste]. Suggest two ways to make my bullet clearer and more specific. Keep my voice, and do not add skills, tools, or numbers I did not give you.*

Pause point. Every line on your resume is something you should be ready to talk about. If AI suggests anything that is not true for you, delete it.

MY MATERIALS BUILDER

Your words first. This page captures your raw story before anything gets polished.

1. Role story builder

ROLE OR EXPERIENCE

ORGANIZATION AND DATES

IN MY OWN WORDS: WHAT I DID, WHO I HELPED, WHAT CHANGED

BULLET 1 (ACTION VERB, WHAT, RESULT)

BULLET 2

ROLE OR EXPERIENCE

ORGANIZATION AND DATES

IN MY OWN WORDS: WHAT I DID, WHO I HELPED, WHAT CHANGED

BULLET 1 (ACTION VERB, WHAT, RESULT)

BULLET 2

2. Ruthless edit checklist

- [ ] Every bullet starts with an action verb
- [ ] Words I would not say out loud are gone
- [ ] Nothing on the page is untrue or inflated
- [ ] Keywords from the posting appear honestly
- [ ] Fits on one page and saved as a PDF
- [ ] Someone I trust read it with fresh eyes

3. LinkedIn and cover letter

MY LINKEDIN HEADLINE

WHY THIS ORGANIZATION MATTERS TO ME

THE ONE STORY I WILL TELL

SEE IT DONE

FROM YOUR WORDS TO YOUR RESUME: A WORKED EXAMPLE

Here is the human first method from Stage 3, start to finish, using a sample student who works part time at a grocery store. Notice that every final bullet comes from something the student actually said.

1. In the student's own words

> "I work at a grocery store about 20 hours a week. Mostly I'm on the register, but when we're short I help stock shelves. Last summer I trained two new people. Sometimes customers get upset about prices, and I either fix it or call the manager. I also close out my drawer at the end of my shift."

2. Skills hiding in that story

Customer service · Calm problem solving · Training others · Cash handling · Flexibility and teamwork · Reliability

3. First draft bullets

- Helped customers at the register and handled problems with prices
- Trained new employees
- Counted my drawer at closing
- Helped stock shelves sometimes

4. After the ruthless edit

Cashier, Neighborhood Grocery · 20 hours per week

- Resolved customer pricing concerns at checkout, bringing in a manager when a situation called for one
- Trained 2 new cashiers on register procedures during summer onboarding
- Closed out and balanced the cash drawer at the end of each shift
- Restocked shelves during short staffed shifts so customers could find what they needed

What changed

Each bullet starts with an action verb. The numbers (2 new cashiers, 20 hours) came from the student. Vague words like "helped" and "sometimes" became specific actions. The sample employer name is fictional.

What AI suggested, and why it was cut

One AI tool offered: "Managed customer relations for 500+ daily shoppers." The student never counted customers and did not manage anyone. It sounded impressive, but it was not true, so it stayed out.

STAGE 4 OF 6

04 Grow Your Network

Networking is relationship building, not asking strangers for jobs. You already have a network. This stage helps you see it and grow it one honest conversation at a time.

1. **Map who you already know.** Family and friends, professors, advisors, coaches, supervisors, coworkers, classmates, faith and volunteer communities, and alumni from your school.
2. **Choose five people to start.** Pick people who work in, or know someone in, a field you are curious about. Five is enough to build momentum.
3. **Reach out with a short, specific message.** Say who you are, why you are reaching out to them, and ask for a 15 to 20 minute conversation. Keep it brief and kind.
4. **Have a learning conversation.** Ask about their path and their advice. You are gathering insight, not asking for a job. Opportunities often grow out of these conversations naturally.
5. **Thank them and stay in touch.** Send a thank you within a day or two. Every few months, share an update or something they might find useful.

Sample outreach message

Hi [Name], I am a [year] [major] student at [school] exploring careers in [field]. I noticed you work as a [role] at [organization]. Would you be open to a 15 minute conversation about your path? I would really value your perspective. Thank you, [Your Name]

Questions worth asking

1. What does a typical week look like for you?
2. Which skills matter most in your work?
3. What do you wish you had known at my stage?
4. How did you get your first role in this field?
5. Who else would you suggest I talk with?

If talking to new people drains you, that is okay. Networking can happen one conversation at a time, and thoughtful written messages count.

GPS PROMPT: Try This with AI

Use AI to help you find the words, then make them sound like you.

Try this: *Help me write a short, warm message to [who they are to me] asking for a 15 minute conversation about [field]. Here is what I want to say, in my own words: [notes]. Keep it under 80 words and make it sound like a college student, not a robot.*

Pause point. Not everyone will respond. Silence usually reflects someone's busy calendar, not your worth. One follow up after a week or two is plenty.

MY NETWORK MAP

You know more people than you think. Write down names, even if a connection feels small.

1. My circles

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

CAMPUS (FACULTY, ADVISORS, COACHES, SUPERVISORS)

COMMUNITY (WORK, FAITH, VOLUNTEERING)

ONLINE (ALUMNI, LINKEDIN, GROUPS)

2. My first five conversations

NAME	HOW I KNOW THEM	WHAT I WANT TO LEARN	DATE REACHED	FOLLOW UP

3. My 30 second introduction

Hi, I am	
I am studying	
I am interested in	
because	
I would love to learn	

SPOTLIGHT

CAREER FAIR PLAYBOOK

A career fair puts many employers in one room, and short conversations there can lead to interviews, internships, and contacts you keep for years. A plan turns a crowded event into a series of focused, manageable conversations.

Before

1. Find the list of attending employers, usually published by your career center.
2. Choose 5 to 8 to visit, plus one "practice" employer to warm up with.
3. Look up what each does and prepare one question for each.
4. Practice your 30 second introduction from Workbook 4.
5. Print several copies of your resume, and plan an outfit that feels professional and comfortable. Many career centers offer free resume printing or professional clothing, so ask.

During

1. Start with your practice employer.
2. Walk up, make eye contact if it feels comfortable, and share your introduction.
3. Ask your question, and listen for what they look for in candidates.
4. Ask for the best way to follow up, and note the recruiter's name.
5. Step aside after each conversation to jot down notes.

After

1. Within a day or two, send a short thank you email or a personalized LinkedIn invitation.
2. Apply online if the recruiter asked you to. Many employers require it even after you meet in person.
3. Add each employer to your tracker in Workbook 5.

Pause point. Crowds and noise can be a lot. It is okay to plan breaks, step outside, go with a friend, or arrive at a quieter time. For a virtual fair, test your camera and audio, choose a quiet spot, and keep your resume open on screen. You can contact the event organizers ahead of time to ask about accessibility.

YOUR TURN · MY FAIR PLAN

EMPLOYER	MY QUESTION FOR THEM	WHO I MET	FOLLOW UP SENT

STAGE 5 OF 6

05 Apply With Intention

A few thoughtful applications to roles that fit will serve you better than dozens of generic ones. Intention protects both your results and your energy.

1. **Choose roles that fit.** Check each posting against your values, needs, and target titles from Workbooks 1 and 2 before you invest your time.
2. **Tailor honestly.** Reorder bullets so the most relevant experience comes first, echo the posting's keywords where they are true, and adjust your cover letter's opening story.
3. **Keep formatting simple.** Many employers use applicant tracking systems to sort applications. Standard headings, a clean layout, and the file type they request help your materials get read.
4. **Follow the instructions exactly.** Answer every required question, attach what they ask for, and double check the role title and organization name.
5. **Track everything.** Record each application the day you submit it. A tracker turns a blur of activity into a clear picture you can learn from.
6. **Follow up with care.** If you have a contact, a brief, polite note about a week or two after applying is appropriate. One follow up is enough.

A SAMPLE WEEKLY RHYTHM (ADJUST IT TO YOUR LIFE)

3 to 5	2	1	1
tailored applications	networking actions	skill building hour	full day of rest

GPS PROMPT: Try This with AI

AI can show you how closely your resume matches a posting. Remove your phone, email, and address before you paste.

Try this: *Compare my resume to this job posting. List the most important skills and keywords from the posting, then tell me which ones already appear in my resume and which are missing. Do not rewrite my resume. [paste resume] [paste posting]*

Pause point. Long silences after applying are common across hiring. They do not mean you did something wrong.

MY APPLICATION TRACKER

Write it down the day you apply. The Job Search Template prompt on page 24 can build a digital version too.

DATE	ORGANIZATION	ROLE	SOURCE	STATUS	FOLLOW UP	NOTES

Before I hit submit

- [ ] Role fits my values and needs
- [ ] Resume tailored to this posting
- [ ] Cover letter names this organization
- [ ] Every required question answered
- [ ] Files named and saved as requested
- [ ] Logged in my tracker

What I am learning

PATTERNS I NOTICE IN RESPONSES, ROLES, OR POSTINGS

STAGE 6 OF 6

06 Interview and Decide

An interview is a conversation in both directions. They are learning about you, and you are learning whether this place is right for you.

1. **Research with purpose.** Read the organization's website, mission, and recent news. Reread the posting and circle the skills they mention most.
2. **Prepare your stories with STAR.** Situation, Task, Action, Result. Build four or five stories you can adapt: a challenge, a team success, a mistake you learned from, a time you led, and a time you helped someone.
3. **Practice out loud.** Rehearse with a friend, mentor, career center, or AI. Aim for natural, not memorized.
4. **Plan the logistics.** For video interviews, test your technology and lighting. For in person interviews, plan your route and arrive about ten minutes early. You may request accommodations for any part of the hiring process.
5. **Ask your own questions.** Prepare two or three, such as how success is measured in the role, or what support new team members receive.
6. **Send a thank you.** Within 24 hours, send a short note that thanks them and mentions one thing you enjoyed discussing.
7. **Weigh any offer.** Ask for the offer in writing and for time to decide. Compare pay, benefits, schedule, growth, and culture with your values. It is often reasonable to ask respectful questions about pay. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (bls.gov/ooh) offers wage information by occupation.

GPS PROMPT: Try This with AI

Practice with an AI interviewer, then practice with a person.

Try this: *Act as an interviewer for a [role] position at a [type of organization]. Ask me one question at a time and wait for my answer. After each answer, give me one strength and one suggestion. Ask five questions total, then summarize what I did well.*

Pause point. Nerves are your body getting ready to show up. Taking a slow breath before you answer is always allowed, and so is asking them to repeat a question.

MY INTERVIEW AND OFFER PLANNER

Prepare the stories only you can tell, and decide with your values in view.

1. STAR story builder

STORY 1: A CHALLENGE I WORKED THROUGH

SITUATION

TASK

ACTION

RESULT

STORY 2: A TIME I WORKED WELL WITH OTHERS

SITUATION

TASK

ACTION

RESULT

2. My questions for them

3. Thank you note notes

WHO I MET AND ONE THING WE DISCUSSED

4. Offer comparison

WHAT MATTERS	OFFER A	OFFER B
Pay		
Benefits		
Schedule and flexibility		
Location and commute		
Growth and training		
Team and culture		
Fit with my top values		

THROUGHOUT YOUR SEARCH

CARE FOR YOURSELF ALONG THE WAY

Job searching asks a lot of your nervous system. Uncertainty, waiting, and rejection are hard for everyone, and they can feel heavier if you are also managing classes, work, family, or past experiences that make evaluation feel unsafe. Caring for yourself is not a distraction from your search. It is what makes your search sustainable.

Reframe a "no"

A rejection tells you about fit, timing, and the number of applicants. It does not measure your value. Notice it, feel it, and then ask what, if anything, you want to adjust.

Protect your time

Set a window for search tasks and close the laptop when it ends. Checking email constantly raises stress without raising results.

Lean on people

Career coaches, mentors, counselors, and trusted friends can help you carry this. Asking for support is a professional skill.

YOUR TURN · WEEKLY CHECK IN

MY REALISTIC WEEKLY GOALS

Applications

Networking actions

Skill building

Rest and joy

MY SUPPORT PEOPLE

WINS THIS WEEK, BIG OR SMALL

WHEN I HEAR "NO," I WILL

USING AI WITH INTEGRITY

AI tools can save you time and help you practice, but they cannot know your story, your values, or your goals the way you do. These principles help you use AI in ways employers respect and that keep your voice at the center.

1. Draft first, then refine.

Write in your own words before asking AI for help. People who start with their own voice keep it. People who start with AI often end up sounding like everyone else.

2. Verify everything.

AI can state wrong information confidently, including job titles, company details, salaries, and facts about real people. Check it against official sources.

3. Protect your privacy.

Never paste your Social Security number, birth date, home address, passwords, student ID, or financial details. Remove your contact information before pasting a resume. Page 23 walks through how.

4. Stay honest.

Never let AI add experience, skills, or results you do not have. Interviews will test every line.

5. Follow the rules of the room.

Some employers do not allow AI during assessments or interviews, and your school's academic integrity policy applies to coursework. When in doubt, ask.

6. Keep your voice.

If something AI wrote does not sound like you, rewrite it until it does.

Green light

- Brainstorming skills from your experiences
- Practicing interview questions
- Comparing your resume to a posting
- Organizing a tracker or weekly plan

Yellow light

- Suggesting edits to your bullets (keep your voice)
- Drafting outreach messages (personalize them)
- Researching salaries and employers (verify with official sources)

Red light

- Inventing experience or results
- Using AI during a live interview without permission
- Pasting private or sensitive information
- Sending AI text without reading and editing it

PROTECT YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION WHEN USING AI

AI assistants can be genuinely helpful, and anything you type into one may be stored, reviewed, or used by the company that runs it. A few habits let you get the benefits while keeping your private information private.

PRIVACY NOTICE

AI tools are not all alike. Each company sets its own rules for how it stores, reviews, and uses what you share, and those rules can change. This guide does not endorse any particular AI tool. Before you use one, read its privacy settings and policy, and decide what you are comfortable sharing.

Never share

- Social Security or other government ID numbers
- Your birth date, home address, or personal phone number
- Passwords, login codes, or security answers
- Bank, credit card, or other financial details
- Your student ID number
- Health or medical information

Protect other people too

Leave out your references' phone numbers and emails, coworkers' full names, private messages someone sent you, and details about classmates or family. Use roles instead, such as [my supervisor] or [Company A].

Clean it up before you paste

Delete the contact block at the top of your resume. Remove comments, tracked changes, and hidden notes from any file before you upload it. Share only the section you need help with, not the whole document.

Check your settings

Look for options to turn off chat history, keep your conversations out of model training, or use a temporary chat. Delete conversations you no longer need. If your school or employer provides an AI tool, ask whether it includes added data protections.

Secure your account

Use a strong, unique password and turn on two step verification where it is offered. Sign out on shared or public computers.

Spot the red flags

Be cautious of any "AI career tool," chatbot, or recruiter that asks for your Social Security number, bank information, or a fee. Legitimate employers do not need those details before a written offer.

A simple test.

If you would not want it posted on a public bulletin board, leave it out of the chat.

GPS PROMPT: BUILD YOUR JOB SEARCH TEMPLATE

One prompt, six questions, and a complete weekly system made around your life.

HOW TO USE THIS PROMPT

Open the AI tool you choose, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Microsoft Copilot, copy the full prompt into the chat, and answer each question as it comes. When your template appears, copy the tables into Excel, Word, or Google Sheets, or ask the assistant to create a file if your version offers that option. Before you start, review the privacy steps on page 23, and leave out private details such as your address, phone number, and student ID.

COPY EVERYTHING IN THIS BOX

You are a supportive, trauma informed career coach helping a college student plan a first job search. Help me build a personal Job Search Template I can use every week.

Ask me these questions one at a time, and wait for my answer before asking the next one:

1. What is my major, and when do I expect to graduate?
2. What kinds of work, industries, or causes am I curious about?
3. Where do I want to work (specific cities, remote, hybrid, or open)?
4. What are my needs (the pay I need, schedule, commute, and values that matter most)?
5. How many hours each week can I realistically give to my search?
6. What experience do I have so far (jobs, classes, projects, volunteering, caregiving, athletics, activities)?

When I have answered all six, build my template with these sections:

A. Target Profile: 3 to 5 job titles to search, each with a one sentence plain language description and why it fits what I shared.
B. Search Keywords: words and phrases to use on job boards.
C. Where to Look: the types of places to search. Only name specific organizations if I gave you a location, and remind me to verify each one.
D. Weekly Plan: a realistic schedule that fits my available hours and includes rest.
E. Application Tracker: a table with columns for Date, Organization, Job Title, Link, Status, Contact, Follow Up Date, and Notes.
F. Friday Reflection: three short questions I can answer at the end of each week.

Rules: Use simple, encouraging language. Do not invent experience I did not share. If you are unsure about a fact, tell me. Format every table so I can copy it into Excel or Word.

After you get your template, read it closely. Change anything that does not fit you, and bring it to a career coach or mentor for a second look.

GPS PROMPT: BUILD YOUR NETWORKING TEMPLATE

Turn the people you already know into a clear, comfortable plan for connection.

HOW TO USE THIS PROMPT

Open the AI tool you choose, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Microsoft Copilot, copy the full prompt into the chat, and answer each question as it comes. When your template appears, copy the tables into Excel, Word, or Google Sheets, or ask the assistant to create a file if your version offers that option. Before you start, review the privacy steps on page 23, and leave out private details such as your address, phone number, and student ID.

COPY EVERYTHING IN THIS BOX

You are a supportive, trauma informed career coach helping a college student build confidence with networking. Help me create a personal Networking Template.

Ask me these questions one at a time, and wait for my answer before asking the next one:

1. What field or types of roles am I exploring?
2. Who do I already know (family, friends, professors, coaches, supervisors, coworkers, community members)?
3. What school do I attend, and what is my major and year?
4. What do I most want to learn from people in my field?
5. Do I feel more comfortable writing messages, talking on the phone, or meeting in person?
6. How much time can I give to networking each week?

When I have answered all six, build my template with these sections:

A. My Network Map: organize the people I named into four circles (Family and Friends, Campus, Community, Online), and suggest types of people I could add.
B. My 30 Second Introduction: written with my own words and lightly polished, so it still sounds like me.
C. Outreach Messages: three short templates (someone I know, an alum I have not met, someone I met at an event), each under 100 words, with [brackets] where I personalize.
D. Conversation Guide: eight questions for a 15 to 20 minute informational conversation.
E. Thank You and Follow Up: one thank you template and one check in template for a few months later.
F. Networking Tracker: a table with columns for Name, How I Know Them, Organization, Date Contacted, Response, Next Step, Follow Up Date, and Notes.
G. Gentle Goals: weekly networking goals that match my comfort level and time.

Rules: Use warm, plain language. Keep my voice. Do not invent facts about real people or organizations. Format every table so I can copy it into Excel or Word.

After you get your template, read it closely. Change anything that does not fit you, and bring it to a career coach or mentor for a second look.

QUICK PROMPT LIBRARY

Replace anything in [brackets] with your own details. Read every answer with a critical eye, and keep only what is true and sounds like you.

Skills translator

PATTERN

Here is something I did, in my own words: [paste]. What transferable skills does this show? Explain each in one plain sentence and do not invent anything.

Posting decoder

PATTERN

Explain this job posting in plain language. Separate the required qualifications from the preferred ones, and tell me what a typical day might involve. [paste posting]

Bullet sharpener

PATTERN

Here is my resume bullet: [bullet]. Suggest two clearer versions that keep my voice. Do not add tools, numbers, or skills I did not mention.

Outreach helper

PATTERN

Help me write a warm, 80 word message to [person and relationship] asking for a 15 minute conversation about [field]. My notes: [notes].

Keyword match

PATTERN

Compare my resume to this posting. List the key skills in the posting and show which appear in my resume and which are missing. Do not rewrite anything.

Interview coach

PATTERN

Act as an interviewer for a [role]. Ask one question at a time. After each answer, share one strength and one suggestion.

Thank you note

PATTERN

Here is my draft thank you note after an interview: [paste]. Make it clearer and warmer, under 120 words, and keep my wording where you can.

Offer questions

PATTERN

I received a job offer for [role]. What respectful questions could I ask about pay, benefits, schedule, and training before I decide?

READY TO GO DEEPER?

When this workbook has helped you take your first steps, *Your AI GPS Career Toolkit* goes further, with applicant tracking systems, LinkedIn, interviews, offers, and prompts for every career stage. It is free, along with every guide in the series that follows.

KEEP GOING: THE FULL SERIES

Every guide in this series is free at transformwithttw.com. They share one governing question, could you defend every word of this in an interview?, and one principle behind it: AI navigates, and you drive.

For career advisors, educators, and coaches

AI Ethics Quiz. A ten question quiz that builds a shared foundation in five ethical principles for AI use.

Critical Evaluation Framework. Five lenses for judging what AI produces before it reaches a student or employer.

Can You Defend Every Word? A Constraint Design Guide. How to design courses, assignments, and agents that keep the thinking with the student.

Organize, Don't Replace. Three ways to build AI tools that help students organize their own thinking, never write for them.

For job seekers

How to Conduct a First Time Job Search. *(you are here)* A guided, fillable workbook for anyone starting their first search.

Your AI GPS Career Toolkit. The full guide to hiring systems, application materials, and AI, for every career stage.

GO DEEPER WITH THE TEXTBOOK

These guides are free and stand on their own. When you want the full framework behind them, I brought it together in my textbook, *Can You Defend Every Word? Ethical AI for Career Advisors Who Coach, Teach, and Build* (Talent Transformation Whisperer, LLC, 2026). If you coach or advise job seekers, Chapters 2 and 3 map the tools job seekers use and the authenticity gap they face.

Available now on Amazon. Search the title or ISBN 9798140001568.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND WORKS REFERENCED

This guide builds on the work of others who have helped job seekers find their way. Its structure and several practices were informed by Eric J. Handler's *The Job Search Workbook* (Career Handler), Glassdoor's *How to Get a Job: A Step by Step Guide* workbook and Skillshare class with Scott Dobroski, and CareerOneStop's *Find a Job* worksheet from the U.S. Department of Labor. The trauma informed lens draws on guidance from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. All adaptations, framing, and AI practices are the author's own.

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You are more ready than you think.

Every stage you complete builds evidence of what you can do. Come back to this guide whenever you need it, and remember that the story you bring is the foundation, not the obstacle.

About the Author

Megan O'Connor, SHRM-CP, CPRW, is the founder of Talent Transformation Whisperer, LLC, a trauma informed career coach, and the author of approximately 15 books on career development, workplace culture, and women's leadership. Her work draws on more than 20 years across healthcare, nonprofit, corporate, government, and higher education settings, along with credentials as a CBT Practitioner Coach and Neuroscience Coach. She helps people turn their lived experience into confident, authentic career stories, and she teaches the responsible use of AI in career readiness.

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AI-Assisted Content Disclaimer:

This document was developed with AI assistance and has been reviewed, verified, and approved by Megan O'Connor, SHRM-CP, CPRW, as the human expert of record. Final content reflects the author's professional judgment and subject matter expertise.

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