EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Why experience matters.

- It looks great on your CV and is highly valued by employers
- It allows you to develop skills, which will help you stand out from other candidates
- It gives an insight into different options that can help you make informed job choices
- Plus you can develop your contacts for future networking

Why is it so important?

Ultimately, employers want to see evidence of experience and skills on your CV. Why? Because it shows them you can use your skills effectively in a practical, ‘real-life’ context; ie that you have the ability to do the job. If the experience is linked to the industry you are looking to get into, it also shows dedication to that area of work.

Experience also demonstrates that you can take the initiative and have the motivation to get involved and experience situations outside of your degree. Think beyond formal work experience schemes. Experience can be gained from part-time work, volunteering, extra-curricular activities, work shadowing, or even starting your own business.

Tips for success

- Start now
- It is never too early to develop your skills. Keep in mind that some opportunities may have waiting lists (eg hospital experience), and/or may require background checks (DBS, formerly known as CRB checks) which can take time to arrange, so planning ahead and starting early is key to avoid missing out.

Choose wisely to meet your needs

Whatever your degree and potential job interests there will be relevant experience out there. If you don’t have much evidence on your CV of a specific skill, such as leadership or project management, for example, find an opportunity where you can practise that skill, eg organising a fundraising event for a charity.

Apply with care

Just because you are applying for a voluntary or work experience position, doesn’t mean you can rush your application. You still need to convince the recruiter that you have relevant skills and are genuinely interested in the company. Remember: your application is the first impression they will have of you, so make it a positive and professional one.

Make it count

When you’re actually on the job, make the most of it by making a good impression and being organised. Show your enthusiasm by asking questions about the industry and company, and by taking the initiative to get involved as much as possible, offering to help where you can. Make notes about what you learn and do, which you can use in future applications and interviews.

Work experience... and where to find it

- **Part-time and temporary work** Browse opportunities on JobOnline [jobonline.thecareersgroup.co.uk](http://jobonline.thecareersgroup.co.uk), as well as the University of London temp agency: [www.careers.lon.ac.uk/temps](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/temps).
- **Volunteering** Contact your Student Union’s volunteering unit, where there is something for everyone, from helping a charity with their social media/finance/marketing/IT etc, to helping maintain canals or mentoring schoolchildren. See also [http://timebank.org.uk/](http://timebank.org.uk/) and [www.guidestar.org.uk/](http://www.guidestar.org.uk/).
- **Internships** Browse JobOnline for vacancies and register for the STEP London internship programme: [www.careers.lon.ac.uk/internships](http://www.careers.lon.ac.uk/internships).

- **Work shadowing and informal work experience** It is easy to arrange this yourself by contacting an organisation directly with a speculative application. Networking is a good way of making contacts you can later approach when looking for a job.
- Your Careers Department can offer advice on finding and applying to any type of work experience.

SEE ‘Proactive jobhunting: speculative approaches and networking’ PAGE 20

SEE ‘Enterprise for all’ PAGE 42
10 ways to get experience and get ahead

As well as looking to gain work experience and internships with companies, it is possible to generate your own experience to develop the skills and experience you need to make sure your CV packs a punch.

1. Start a blog, write articles for the Student Union magazine, start a department or society newsletter or a Twitter feed. Being able to write clearly and concisely in a way that is suitable for the reader is important in every industry.

2. Put on a play, performance, fashion show or exhibition to get experience of running and marketing events. Liaising with suppliers and venues or seeking sponsorship will allow you to develop negotiation and planning skills as well as commercial awareness.

3. Join a club or society, become a class rep or get involved in your Students’ Union. Taking on a position of responsibility such as treasurer of a society or captain of a sports team can be a great way to develop skills in leadership, communication and organisation.

4. Independent travel can demonstrate practical problem-solving, organisation and planning skills, as well as cultural sensitivity and understanding.

5. Volunteer. From building a database or website for a charity, to developing a marketing campaign or coordinating a research project, there are endless opportunities to get involved in exciting projects that offer substantial experience and opportunity for skills development.

6. Start a business! This could be selling products on eBay or Etsy, tutoring, or perhaps selling products at a market stall. These are all ways to get exposure to the fundamentals of practical business skills.

7. Run a fundraising or PR campaign about an issue you care about to give you practical experience of campaign management. Here you can develop your creative, persuasive and influencing skills.

8. The value of part-time work should not be underestimated. It can allow you to understand how to deal effectively with customers, work in a team, meet targets, manage your time and prove your ability to work under pressure.

9. Attend relevant lectures and conferences. These can be great for finding out more about an industry or subject area, eg human rights, publishing, or international relations, and are excellent opportunities for networking.

10. Take a short course or study online to learn a new skill. Whether you would like to learn a foreign language, get to grips with a piece of software used in the industry you are looking to get in to, or perhaps take an introduction to accountancy or business course, there are a number of ways you can take the initiative to get the know-how recruiters require.

Most importantly, having gained your experience, it is essential to be able to articulate the skills and knowledge you have gained in future applications and interviews, selling the experience in a way that is attractive to the employer.