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## Professionals offer job-seeking tips for graduates

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By Deborah J. Cook

The caps have been tossed and "Pomp and Circumstance" has faded into memory. Now it's time for new graduates to put their education to work. But with unemployment at 9.1 percent, even seasoned workers are having trouble landing a job. How is someone with little experience — aside from a stint scooping ice cream or lifeguarding — going to stand out?

Kim Shriver, director of talent acquisition for **Perrigo Company** in Kalamazoo, recommends that new grads "provide information in detail on classroom work, project work, internships, summer jobs — things that they might not think are directly relevant to the full-time kind of post-college job they are applying for."

What new grads may lack in experience, they make up for in their knowledge of new technologies and information systems, she added.

Volunteering, job shadowing or interning shows employers your level of interest. It is important to match activities to the desired career. Want a job in IT? Volunteer some data-entry time at a nonprofit. Interested in a medical career? Make yourself useful at a nursing home. Document your activities with pictures, samples of work and letters of reference. Also worth noting: Involvement in campus organizations and special projects grads may have worked on.

If a student is looking for a first job, they have to be able to talk to employers about what they are looking for.

"Things like enthusiasm and willingness to work hard count as much as having an A or B average, especially if you can prove it," said Sue Maciak, owner of **Cameo Career and Corporate Consulting LLC**. How you prove it, she said, is by recommendations. She recommends bringing a portfolio with samples of work to interviews and presenting a few relevant pieces.



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 Sue Maciak

### Presentation is important

Recent graduates also need to present themselves in the best possible light.

"The first thing is to smile," Maciak said. Stand up straight, offer a firm — but not bone-crushing — handshake and banish "um" from your vocabulary. A mistake some new interviewees make is not dressing professionally.

"They think that because I'm young, it's OK if I wear tennis shoes or I don't need to have my fingernails manicured nicely," she said.

Apply in the manner requested by the employer. Don't show up in person when the employer has specified an online-only application process.

Once an interview has been secured, research the business.

"We take special notice of candidates that have a solid academic record, internships related to field of study and have taken some time to gain knowledge of **Gentex**," said Doug Meyard, human resources manager for **Gentex** in Zeeland. "Candidates that turn us off are ones that come unprepared for the interview and are overly eager, with very little understanding of how difficult the manufacturing environment is."

College grads also should make sure to take advantage of the job-search services their alma mater provides — usually for life.

"We do workshops on interview preparation, finding an internship, putting a resume together," said Rachel Becklin, assistant director of career services for **Grand Valley State University**. Many universities also offer job sites like Grand Valley's **Lakers Jobs Online**.

"Right now we have 986 internships and jobs posted in there," she said. "It fluctuates daily."

Becklin suggests checking prior to an interview to see if prospective employers have a Twitter or LinkedIn account and follow updates. Identify the skills and values you have that will fit into what you learn about the company culture. Be prepared to be able to tell them why they should hire you.

Once the interview is over, Becklin suggests sending a handwritten thank-you note within 24 hours.

"(It's) important," she said. "They're so rare these days."

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