

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL: FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO CAREERS

Color 2nd Edition

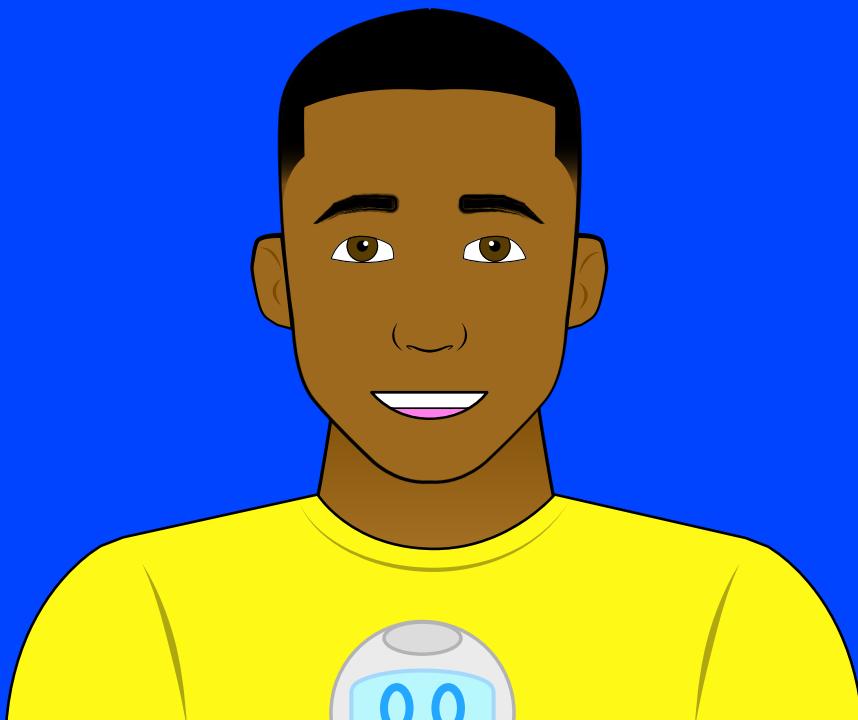
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INTRODUCTION

When first started writing this book I was interchangeably referring to it as a handbook and a guidebook. When in actuality it is a toolbook. A tool is something that you use to help you accomplish a task. My goal when I set out to write this book was to help others navigate the increasingly complex pathway from formal education to a satisfying career. I took all the things that I knew, that I didn't know, and what I thought others needed to know and put it into this book.



My Struggle Doesn't Have to be Your Struggle

After I graduated college with my bachelor's degree, I had a real "WTF" moment. I couldn't get a job in my major. I thought getting a job right out of college was going to be a cakewalk. "Go to college and you will get a good job"—when I was in high school, that was the rhetoric used to influence students to go to college. They left off the part that chances are you won't get a job in your major or that you will need to do more than just obtain a college degree to be competitive.

I was pretty much a first-generation student. I say pretty much because my dad went to college, but he didn't have much of a relationship with me and my twin brother. We didn't really have anyone else to tell us the ins and outs of college. Information at that time wasn't readily available online like it is today. You got it from a person, TV, or some sort of written text.

Off to college I went. There was nothing exciting about my college experience. I went to community college my first year, then transferred to a four-year university, from which I graduated. By then the world was well on its way to a fast-paced and continually changing technological landscape.

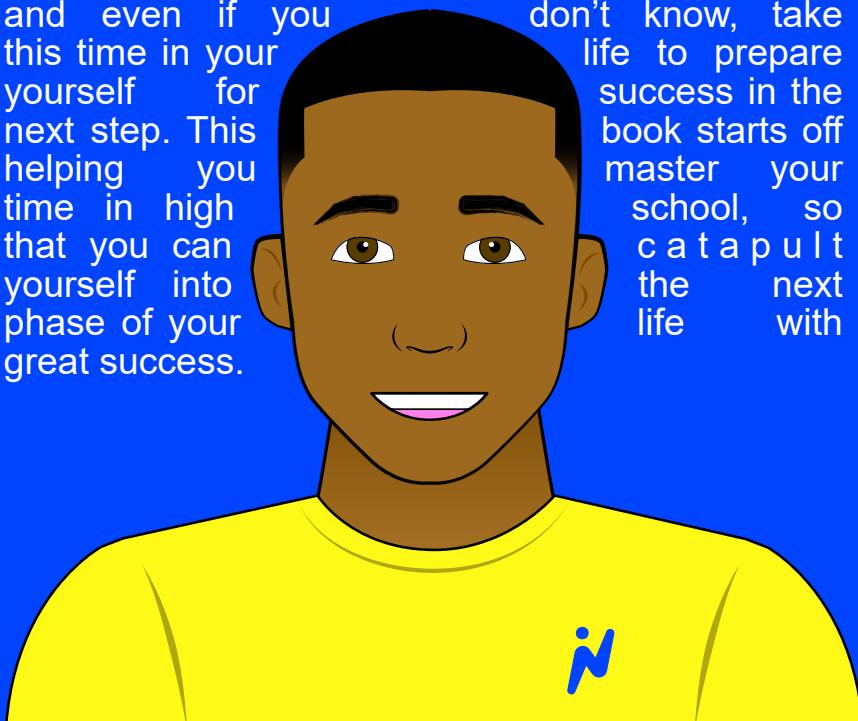
Just going to college wasn't enough anymore. This period was the early stage in corporate America of what I consider the "Unicorn Era." I call it that because it seemed to me as though the qualifications that I saw in job postings were unrealistic (like a unicorn), especially for entry-level positions. I define a unicorn employee as someone who an employer expects to be able to do everything—and do it fast and do it well. A more formal definition is someone who is pleasant to work with, has a unique skill set, wears many hats, and can propel a business to new heights.

The biggest setback for me after graduating with my bachelor's degree wasn't the fact that I wasn't a unicorn—it was that I didn't properly prepare for my career by keeping up with industry and

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1. HIGH SCHOOL

You don't have to have it all figured out by the time you graduate high school. But you should explore your interest and even peak into things that you aren't necessarily into. This section covers ways to be successful while in high school and how to prepare yourself for life after - whether that be college or a college alternative. Whatever the case, and even if you don't know, take this time in your life to prepare yourself for success in the next step. This book starts off helping you master your time in high school, so that you can catapult yourself into the next phase of your life with great success.



Your Career Starts Here

You might have determined that **college** is your next step after graduating high school, or maybe you've decided that it isn't. Whatever your decision, a strong educational foundation is key to a successful and happy life. So, let's look at what you need to do in high school in order to build that strong foundation.

High school will be a **transformative period** in your life. You will be introduced to a lot of different things and people. At times it might even seem overwhelming, but don't let that get to you. Throughout all your new encounters, it is important that you remain focused on performing your best in your classes. Getting a well-rounded education is crucial in our modern society. Remember that knowledge is power; the more knowledge you have, the more power you have. The primary factor of a successful high school career is doing well in your classes, and that starts with having a good relationship with your teachers.

Student-Teacher Relationship

Teachers can be your best friends (or your worst enemies). That's why it is always good to create and maintain positive, professional relationships with your teachers.

The primary benefit of developing these relationships is that teachers are the people who can best speak about you as a student—something that is critical when applying to colleges and jobs. They will be able to tell recruiters things like how dedicated you are, your sharpness, whether you challenge concepts, how well you work with others, and your ingenuity, among others. Teachers can also inform you about events and opportunities that may interest or benefit you. It is important that you take the time while in high school to start developing a strong professional network regardless of your career aspirations. Teachers are a

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High School Classes

How much you learn and how well you develop your skills while in high school could be the determining factors as to whether you must pay for college. Even better, they could determine whether you even need to go to college! Your performance in your high school classes is the main criterion **college admissions committees** look at (Kaplan 2015). They get this information from your high school **transcript**, an official document listing all of your classes and the final grade in each, as well as your overall **Grade Point Average (GPA)**. Given the importance of this, you should not take your high school classes lightly. I know that by now you may be at a point where you are tired of school and all the testing, but stay focused on performing your best in class. In the end, the reward will be greater than the sacrifice. Admissions committees also look at how rigorous your high school classes were; this shows them if you have challenged yourself. It will also give them a good idea of your academic potential. To distinguish yourself from your competition, you can take **Advanced Placement (AP)** or **honors classes**.



STEM & STEAM

Classes that committees pay special attention to are those in the **STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) or **STEAM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) area.

Advanced Placement (AP) Classes

One way to get a jumpstart on college is by taking AP classes. These accelerated classes have an increased difficulty level. Students who take AP classes can earn college credit while in high school if they meet the minimum score requirements. These classes show college admission officers that you can succeed in

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Ideally, it's best to discuss these topics after you have gotten an idea of what you want to do after you graduate so that the two of you can tailor your high school experience toward those goals. But, if that's not the case, visit your guidance counselor to learn about tools and resources that can help you figure out what you might want to do after high school. Be sure to stay in regular communication with your guidance counselor so that you build a strong professional relationship. This should be a person in your professional network while you're in high school. The importance of this relationship lies in your guidance counselor's knowledge of you; being top of mind is a benefit when opportunities arise such as **scholarships** and **grants** for college. But before you can take advantage of a lot of these opportunities, you must first determine whether college is for you.

Mentors

Again, I hope that you can benefit from my struggles. My journey from high school to college to my professional career can best be described as me jumping headfirst into most situations. Not a good thing. At all! Had I had a mentor, the journey would have been much smoother. I didn't really hear much about mentors until around the time that I was completing my bachelor's degree. Needless to say, by then I couldn't be bothered with finding a mentor. My mind was set on landing my ideal career in IT. Not having a mentor while in college and continuing that mistake as a professional was a great disservice to myself.

A mentor is an experienced person in a specific field who shares wisdom with and supports a less experienced person, or mentee. Mentoring is a long-term relationship that focuses on the mentor supporting and guiding the mentee with his or her career (Reh 2019). A mentor can be a variety of people depending on where you are in life. Teachers, college professors, managers, and family and friends are all people that you can consider asking to serve as your mentor.

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Remember, having a mentor is a great benefit to you and your career. Having one can prevent you from making mistakes and missteps throughout your career. Finding a mentor shouldn't be an involved process; the key thing to remember is that your mentor should fit you and your needs.



Mentoring ≠ Coaching

Mentoring is not the same thing as coaching. Coaching is short term and focuses on strengthening or getting rid of a certain behavior as soon as possible.

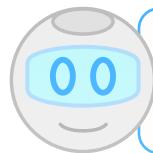
Is College For You?

Don't believe the hype. College is great for many people, but it isn't a place for everyone despite what a lot of people might have you believe. "Everything ain't for everybody." I'm not telling you that you can't or won't succeed in college; what I am telling you is that almost 40% of people who go to college drop out (Hanson 2021). Determining whether college is the right path for you is a big decision. There are a lot of not-so-smart people who graduate from college and a lot of really smart people who never stepped foot on a college campus. That said, going to college shouldn't be based solely on your past academic performance; instead, it should, be based on your personal and career goals, your ability, your resolve, and your potential. Here are some questions that you should ask yourself to help determine whether you should go to college:

- Is a college degree required for your desired career?
 - If no, do you want to take an alternative route to achieve your career goals?
- Are you a good student?
- If you aren't a good student, do you have the ability to succeed in college?

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Lastly, don't go to college for your family or friends. Sometimes the people around you can pressure you or make you feel as if you need to go to college. Going to college needs to be something that you do for yourself and no one else. Ultimately, you need to be satisfied with your career decisions.



Fun Fact!

Heads up!

30% of college freshmen in America drop out before their sophomore year.



If you know that college isn't for you, move on to the "College Isn't for Me" section of this book.

The Importance of a College Degree

One of the primary reasons attending college is so important is that for many professional jobs today, you must have a four-year degree. Georgetown University conducted a research study that concluded that 35% of the job openings in 2020 required at least a bachelor's degree (Georgetown University n.d.).

But besides the obvious, what other factors make a college degree important? A college degree says more about you than that you were able to complete a bunch of courses. It speaks to your dedication; it says that you can work with others; it proves that you were exposed to new ways of thinking and doing, that you are a self-starter, and that you have the determination to complete what you start. Having a college degree can also open up opportunities for you in the future.

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College Application Ranking

Kaplan, a company that provides educational services, has created a list of things that college admissions staff view as the most important admission criteria (Kaplan 2015). Below is a list of five items ranked from most to least important.

- 1 GPA/Class Rank/Coursework
- 2 ACT/SAT Scores
- 3 Essays
- 4 Teacher Recommendations
- 5 Extracurricular Activities

Let's take a look at the items on this list that I haven't covered yet.

ACT and SAT

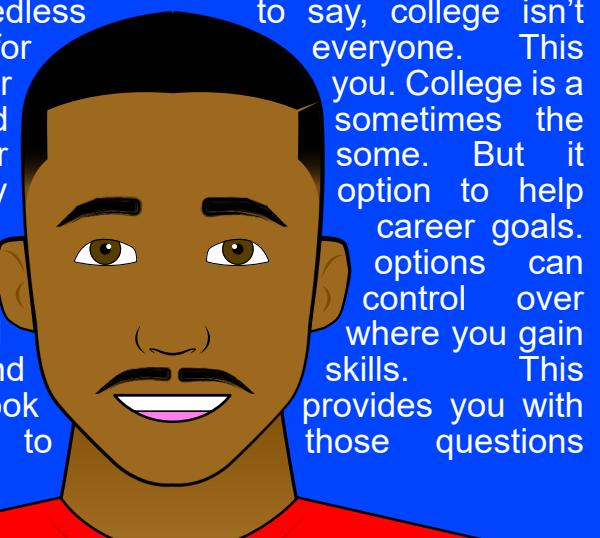
The **ACT** and the **Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)** are both used as part of the criteria for college admission. According to the chart above, your ACT and SAT scores are the second most important things that colleges look at when deciding on your admittance.

In order to do your best on the ACT or SAT, I highly recommend that you take the PreACT or PSAT during your sophomore or junior year in high school. These pretests will give you an idea of what is on the real tests and show you the areas in which you need to improve. When you are ready to take the real test, make sure to get plenty of rest the night before and to rid yourself of all distractions, including **social media**, as hard as that may be. Actually, you might want to unplug from the internet a week or so before your test to really clear your mind of distractions. If you aren't satisfied with your initial ACT or SAT test score, you can take the test again. The number of times you can take the SAT is limited only by the number of offerings and how far along you are in school; you can take the ACT up to 12 times.

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2. COLLEGE ISN'T FOR ME

The way our society is conditioned, you would think that college is the only and the best option after graduating high school. Needless to say, college isn't the best option for everyone. This may be true for you. College is a good option and sometimes the best option for some. But it isn't the only option to help you reach your career goals. Alternative options can give you more control over how, when, and where you gain knowledge and skills. This section of the book provides you with the answers to those questions and more.



Postsecondary Education: Alternatives to College

You don't need or want to go to college and aren't exactly sure what your other career options are. Cool. A big misconception is that college is the only route to a meaningful and financially sound career after you finish high school. That couldn't be further from the truth. Today there are a growing number of ways to continue your education outside of a four-year college. Some benefits to taking these alternate routes are that you save time and money. There is a notable disadvantage of not earning a degree: your career options are limited. Let us take a look at some of the educational alternatives that you can pursue.



College Dropout Rate

If you start college and figure out that it just isn't for you, don't feel bad; 26% of first-time bachelor degree seekers drop out of college (Hanson 2022).

Community Colleges

OK, let's go ahead and address the obvious before we get started. In this book and in many other books and articles, you will see community and junior colleges listed as alternatives to college. Yes, technically they are colleges, but they are listed as alternatives because of their shortened curriculum.

Community colleges or junior colleges are two-year postsecondary educational institutions that offer associate degrees. Associate degrees serve as bridges to four-year degrees; they also prepare students with the necessary skills for a career should they choose not to pursue a four-year degree.

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tools and software that you will use on the job. In some instances, you will have to take part in a **practicum** before you can complete your program.



Pros & Cons of Community Colleges

Pros of community colleges: comparatively cheaper tuition and fees, smaller class sizes, better instructor support, and more night classes in comparison to four-year colleges, and they serve the community in which they are located in (hence the name “community” college).

Cons of community colleges: Loss of credits/course when transferring to four-year university, fewer majors and courses, less to do/lack of campus life.

Vocational Schools

Vocational schools are often referred to as trade schools and technical schools. These are learning institutions that offer tailored programs that focus on preparing you for a specific career. There is little to no traditional classroom training, and vocational schools don't require you to take courses that don't pertain to the career you are pursuing. They are solely focused on preparing you with the skills needed to perform a specific job. Programs at vocational colleges usually take between eight months and two years to complete.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship programs are designed to train you to become skilled in a **trade**. A trade is a highly skilled job that requires special training and is often manual in nature. Apprenticeships require you to learn a new skill by on-the-job training from an experienced professional.

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Financial Aid Options for College Education Alternatives

While practically everyone knows that students can receive financial aid for attending a four-year university, few know there is financial aid for educational opportunities outside colleges and universities. You can receive some form of financial aid for most alternative education options. These include grants; scholarships; federal, private, and institutional loans; and work-study. You will need to complete a FAFSA to be eligible for financial aid. Boot camps offer financial aid that includes private loans and scholarships. Some boot camps offer deferred tuition, installment payments, and income-share agreements. Certificate and certification programs have scholarships, private and personal loans, and installment plans as financial aid options. Additionally, check with your employer to see what type of educational funding or assistance it may provide. In many cases employers will cover your education expenses, especially if it benefits the company. Also, look for and ask about discounts, especially when considering certificate and certification programs. Sometime if you are a member of a specific organization, you may be eligible for a discount with these programs.

Talent Show

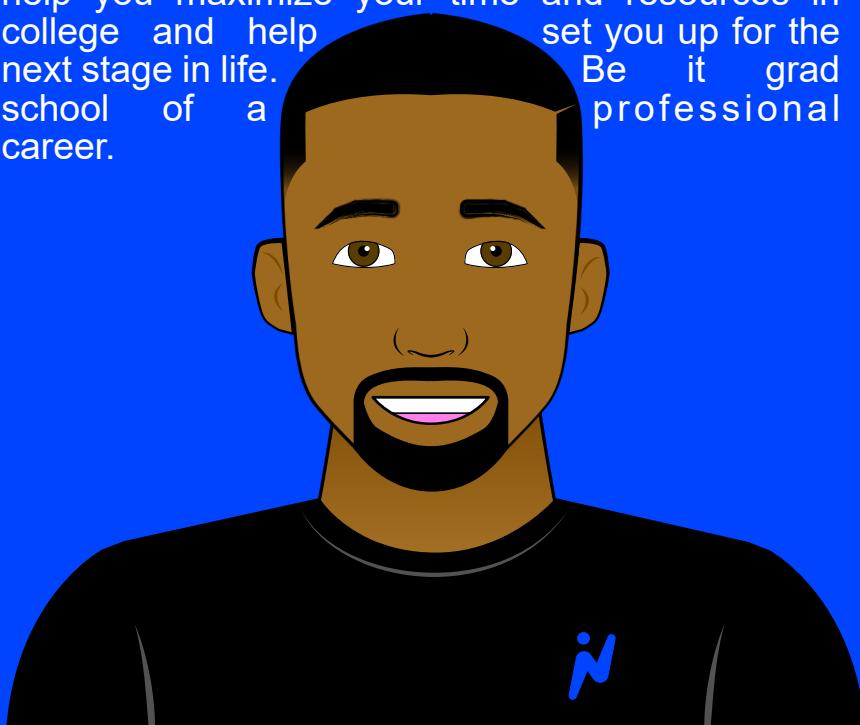
Now that you have your certification or degree or have acquired some new talent, knowledge, or skill, how do you let potential employers know? A common struggle for individuals with skills but no experience is how to convey those skills or knowledge to employers. There are several ways you can make yourself more competitive in the job market with no work experience. You can use one of the options below or a combination of them to show employers that you know your stuff.

Digital portfolios. This is probably the most common way to showcase your skills. You can use a free website like

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3. COLLEGE

“The more things change. The more they stay the same.” As much and as fast as our world is changing, some things remain the same. At least a lot longer than others. A lot of tech and creative skills can be learned without a college degree. But for some other skills there is no escaping the requirement of a college degree. You know, like becoming a doctor or lawyer. This section is imperative to anyone who hasn’t had any type of exposure to college and how to navigate it. It will help you maximize your time and resources in college and help set you up for the next stage in life. Be it grad school or a career.



College: It's a Different World

College will be completely different from anything you've experienced before. This is your first go at "adulting." You won't have anyone telling you to study, go to work, clean up, go to bed, or any of the things you heard growing up. OK, well, let's be honest . . . your mom will probably still have something to say if she's anything like my mom (love you, Mom!). Most likely you will be in a new city, state, or in some cases even a new country. You will be surrounded by people from all over the world with different beliefs, styles, attitudes, and perceptions. You will learn and you will grow, and hopefully, at the end your college experience, you will be a better version of yourself!

So, What's the Purpose of College Anyway?

The purpose of college is a somewhat contentious topic. Over the years this topic has been increasingly discussed and debated due to factors like the increase in student enrollment, students' lack of job-related skills, the increase in tuition, and the insurmountable amount of student loan debt. According to PEW, 47% of people believe college is the gateway to a better life, and its purpose is to prepare students for the workforce (Heimlich 2011). Others (39%) think that the purpose of college is to create well-educated and enlightened individuals. Then there is the 12% who say that college should serve both purposes.

This is why your purpose for attending college and the mission of the college that you are interested in attending must align. A quick and easy way of getting an idea of a college's stance on its purpose as an institution is by viewing its vision and mission statement. You might even want to look at the mission statement of the department from which you would be obtaining your degree.

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tend to use the same teaching methods and assessment materials year after year.

Professors at research institutions tend to put more focus on research, presenting at conferences, getting publications, and grant writing than they do on developing curriculum and classroom experiences. So be aware of these things when choosing professors and colleges. In some cases, you might not be able to choose a professor; there might be only one professor teaching the class. To get started on finding out about prospective professors, check out *Rate My Professor* (<http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/>). On this site students leave comments, rate their professors, and share other valuable information.



Instructor or Professor

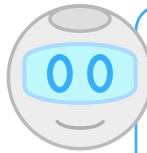
You might even consider taking the course under an instructor instead of a professor. Instructors aren't tenure track and can focus more on the learning experience due to the lack of responsibilities that tenure-track professors have.

Don't Memorize. Learn.

Memorization and learning are like knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and information; wisdom is the application of the combination of knowledge and experiences with real-life situations. Memorization is the act of committing something to your memory. Memorizing information doesn't mean that you understand it. Learning is the ability to interpret or understand information in a certain way.

Memorization in the form of "cramming" is committed to short-term memory. This might be beneficial when you need to pass an exam.

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“Skills Not Degrees”

“These are qualities that you don't necessarily pick up from a degree. There are qualities . . . that have a tendency to be completely overlooked when people are sifting through résumés or LinkedIn profiles. And yet, increasingly, we find that these are the kinds of people that make the biggest difference within our organization.

Increasingly I hear this mantra: Skills, not degrees. It's not skills at the exclusion of degrees. It's just expanding our perspective to go beyond degrees” (Bariso 2017)

—Jeff Weiner, LinkedIn CEO

Interdisciplinary Studies

A bachelor's degree in **interdisciplinary studies** is a degree that is designed to fit the specialized educational needs and interests of a student. This degree is offered so that students can earn a degree in a specialized area not offered by their college. These degrees allow students to select their **concentrations**. Most colleges require that a student pick two or three concentrations as part of the degree requirements. Job recruiters may have a hard time understanding what a degree in interdisciplinary studies is, so you'll need to make sure you do a good job of explaining your degree to them.

Take Courses That Will Make You Marketable to Employers

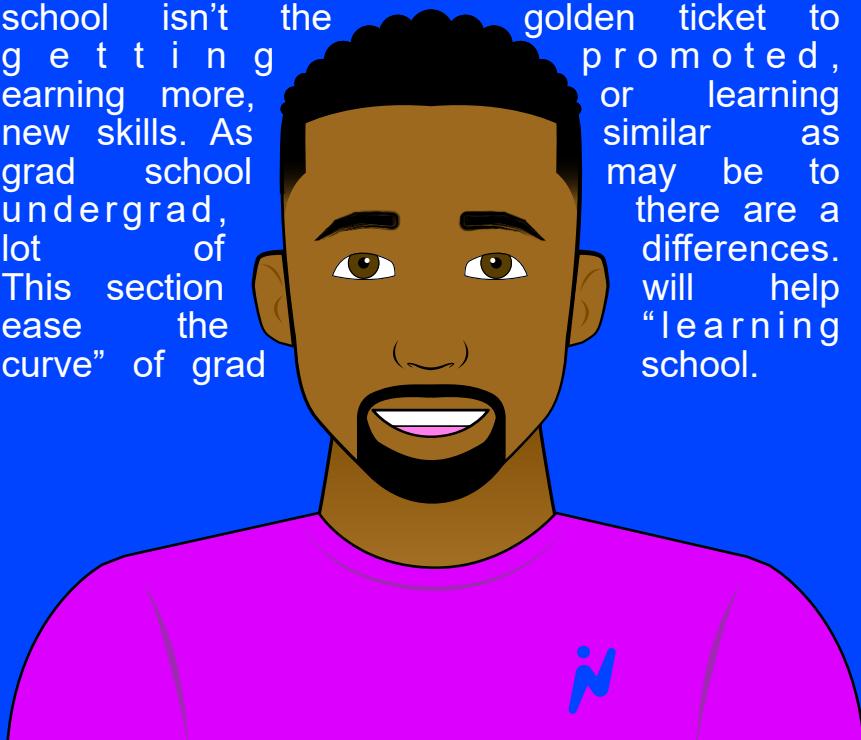
When looking at job descriptions, it may seem that employers want you to know how to do everything under the sun. I

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4. GRAD SCHOOL

Honestly, grad school changed my perspective on college. More specifically, my time spent in grad school obtaining my Ph.D. Grad school is essential in a lot of cases. But obtaining a graduate degree isn't always just for professional goals and advancement. Sometimes it's personal. Which was part of the reason I got my Ph.D. However, grad school isn't the golden ticket to getting promoted, earning more, new skills. As grad school under grad, lot of This section ease the curve" of grad

or learning similar as may be to there are a differences. will help "learning school.



The Proposal

This section will cover the key components necessary for most dissertation proposals. A **dissertation proposal** is a comprehensive document that outlines your proposed research project. It is the first few chapters of your dissertation—usually the chapters before the Findings and Conclusion chapters. After the document is complete, you must present your proposal to your dissertation committee. The committee must approve your proposal before you can proceed to conducting your research and completing your dissertation.

Introduction

The Introduction of your dissertation is where you give the what, why, and how of your study: what you are researching and intend to answer, why the research is important, and how you will conduct your research. Here you will find information like the following:

- Dissertation topic
- Purpose of the study
- Statement of the problem
- Background of the problem
- Significance of the study
- Research questions
- Limitations and delimitations
- Assumptions of the study
- Definition of terms

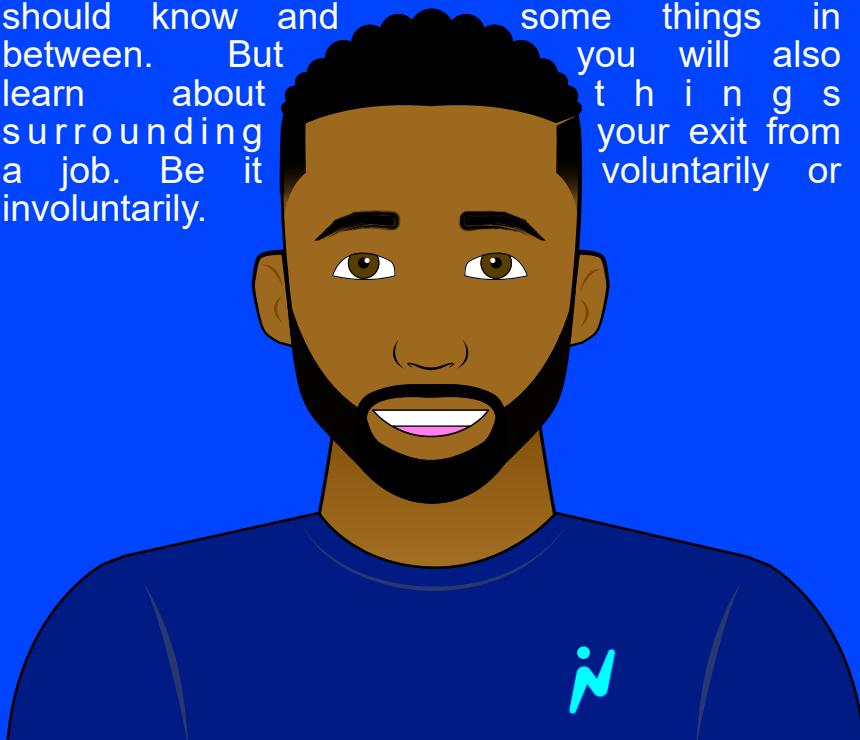
Your **dissertation topic** is a broad area of interest on which you want to conduct your dissertation.

The **purpose of the study** is simply why you are doing the research and what question(s) you plan on answering.

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5. CAREERS

Going into corporate America I didn't have any experience with it, be it first-hand or second. My resume was filled with part-time retail jobs. My mom transitioned from a garment factory worker to construction worker. No cousins, aunts, or uncles to explain to me the culture of the "holy grail" of work environments. The dress code, etiquette, professional development, salary, and even retribution were all new concepts to me. This section is a from-the-cradle-to-the-grave overview. You will learn the critical things a corporate newbie should know and some things in between. But you will also learn about surrounding things your exit from a job. Be it voluntarily or involuntarily.



Gettin' Your Turn at Bat

This is it! You've reached the big league. It's time to start your new career. But hold up—isn't a career just a fancy name for a job? Well, not really; a career is defined as a profession that someone takes for a long period of time throughout his or her life with the possibility to grow and develop within that profession. A job is paid employment with little or no advancement or professional development. Jobs, unlike careers, teach you a new skill, like learning how to use a new piece of equipment or software to perform your job duties, only when necessary. To have a long and successful career, there are some important things that you need to be aware of once you start out. They are:

- **Training and development.** Your organization should provide you with adequate learning opportunities that enable you to continue to grow as a professional. If you are not growing or given the opportunity to grow at your current organization, you might not want to stay there long. Don't do yourself a disservice and become stagnant as a professional in your field because your current situation isn't providing you with the tools and resources to grow as a professional. Working for an organization that doesn't provide you with development opportunities will cause you to become less competitive when looking for new opportunities both internally and externally.
- **Career options.** Not everyone wants to move up in his or her current position. This could be the case for you one day. If you are the type of person that likes variety in life and know that there is a strong possibility that you will want to change careers down the road, make sure that your organization offers you the opportunity to move into a different position.
- **Know your strengths and weaknesses.** This is important because you will want to navigate your career moves so that they work in unison with your strengths. You should always be improving your skills, but you should also be aware of your weaknesses and how to work around them.

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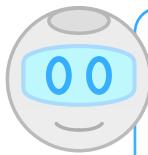
Prioritize: Set Goals

Define a specific **end goal**, then create **short-term goals**. End goals define exactly what you want your outcomes to be; they are things that you are unwilling to compromise on. Short-term goals are actions you take to reach your end goals. They are a series of smaller, simpler, and easily achievable goals used to help you achieve your main goal. Short-term goals give you a sense of accomplishment and prevent the feeling of being overloaded and discouraged. Defining and accomplishing short-term goals not only helps you reach long-term and end goals but can also help you reach **milestones**. Reaching a milestone indicates that you have reached a significant change on the development of the project. Milestones can give you an extra boost of confidence and enthusiasm as you move toward accomplishing your end goal.

SMART GOALS

Earlier I talked about goals and their importance. But creating objectives for goals can sometimes be a challenge. You can use SMART goals to help you create clear, actionable items and a sense of direction; identify what is important; and motivate you. A SMART goal is a tool used to help guide you with goal setting. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. The chart below will give you more detail about each part of SMART goals. You can find numerous SMART goal templates and how to create effective SMART goals online.

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**Quote**

“Having faith in something commits a part of our energy to that thing: having faith in someone commits a part of our energy to that person: having faith in an idea commits a part of our energy to that idea: having faith in fear commits a part of our energy to that fear. As a result of our energy commitments, we – our minds, hearts and lives – become woven into their consequences. Our faith and our power to choose are, in fact, the power of creation itself.”

- Caroline Myss

Applicant Tracking System (ATS)

ATSS are computer software that companies use to sort and filter applications and résumés, in addition to performing several other recruiting tasks. These systems rely heavily on keywords for the résumé filtering and rejection process. A lot of ATS systems rank résumés/applicants based on how well they match a job description. This is why including keywords and phrases in your résumés and applications is important when applying for different jobs. Some key things that ATSS specifically track are related skills (both hard and soft skills), job titles, and years of experience. The way that your résumé is formatted is important. If your résumé is not formatted in an “ATS-friendly” way, it will most likely result in your application ranking low or being rejected.

Man vs. the Machine: ATS Tips & Tricks

You can't win a game if you don't know how to play it. To help you “win” a job, try these tips out to help you beat the applicant tracking system (ATS).

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Remember, there is no exact science to calculating a consulting fee. Make sure that you take all the methods and information mentioned above into consideration when determining how and how much to charge. You can search online for free and paid consultant fee agreement templates that you can use to outline your consulting fees and the services that you will perform.

Negotiating

Negotiating is important because it benefits everyone involved, you get the best deal possible, it helps manage conflict and crisis, and it helps build strong relationships and build rapport. Below are some tips from the experts that will help you to become a more effective negotiator.

MasterClass.com (MasterClass staff 2021) listed these five tips as ways to become a better negotiator:

Make the first offer. This is one of the best negotiating strategies. By doing this you set the initial terms of the negotiation. Research has even shown that when the seller makes the opening offer, the final price tends to be higher. It also allows you to steer the conversation in the direction of your interests.

When discussing money, use concrete numbers instead of a range. Giving a skilled negotiator a range will likely result in the person going with the lowest price from the start. You might have a minimum price set in your mind, but don't start negotiations at that price. Start on the upper end of the range that you set; if the other party doesn't want to pay that much, the person will say so.

Only talk as much as you need to. Silence can throw people off during negotiations. Maintaining eye contact and not speaking may cause others to become uncertain in their decision making. It may cause them to start making decisions that they wouldn't otherwise. Being silent during negotiations can also give you the opportunity to observe the other person's reactions.

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6. SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET

There is no shortage of fun and games on the internet. But when we take time to look and search beyond that, we can find an unimaginable amount of resources that can help us grow and develop into better versions of ourselves. Using the offensive and action. This help you to use the reach your inform you on and other using it to find you.



Builder and Monster are great resources for job searches. You can also find jobs via your network. Professionals often post job openings at their companies on their feeds. Sometimes they will even share an opening that a friend has asked them to share with their network. This is why it is important to be active with your network. You can also simply ask the people in your network if they know about any job opportunities. A lot of times people in your network don't know when you are looking for a job; even if you post it on your social media accounts there is still a good chance that they might miss the post. Reaching out to individuals directly can be very effective when looking for job opportunities.

How Colleges & Corporations use Social Media

Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities use social media for many different reasons, but their primary use of it is to share information and to recruit students. Colleges and departments within a college will post updates about what they have going on. You will find posts about things like deadlines, special events, guest speakers, athletics, achievements, and student spotlights. They may use social media to interact with their audience via live broadcasts, giveaways, and contests.

They also use it to view the behavior and character of college applicants. So, what does this mean for you? Since you could potentially become a part of their community, recruiters want to make sure that they are accepting exceptional students. A student's acceptance to a college may be declined or rescinded because of what the college finds on the student's social media profile. When reviewing profiles, recruiters look for red flags. A large interest in violence (posting a lot of violent pictures, videos, or text), pictures with alcohol in them, hate toward a specific

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be very detrimental to your brand. Ask family members and friends not to tag you or post damaging content of you (i.e., wild parties, drinking, using illegal substances, overly sexy/sexual images, etc.). Content posted of you should highlight the positive side of you and your brand. Ask yourself, “Is this portraying me in a good light?” before you post any type of media of yourself online. **Slander** is also something to keep an eye out for. Negative words can be just as damaging as pictures and videos. This isn’t something that you want to spend hours every week or day doing, but make sure that you do take some time out every so often to check on these things.

Google Yourself

The best way to find out about yourself online is to Google yourself. The search results can be very telling. I, with my boring life, have been **catfished** before. I found out via the grapevine, but a simple search of myself would have displayed the fake Instagram account. When searching yourself, make sure you search for variations of your name and even middle names and nicknames. The person who catfished me used the name Carl instead of Carlos. Things like this usually happen when you have a public or open social media account; when that is the case, it makes finding the culprit more difficult.

If you have a public social media account, searching for yourself online should be a higher priority than for those who have private accounts. With things like catfishing; identity theft; and what will soon be a big issue, **deepfake**, you might be surprised at what you find out about yourself in your search results. Don’t just limit your search to text; Google and Bing both have an **image search** feature. These tools allow you to use an image instead of words to perform a search to see where an image is being used online.

If your search results include negative items that can hurt your brand, then you should take the necessary steps to get them removed. If you’re not sure how to do this, you can always hire a professional to handle it for you.

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