

Approach the On Ramp

Following are some things to consider before you put your hands on the wheel. During this step in the process, you'll do some industry and market research to better inform **your job search process**.

1. Do your homework

Study the market you wish to live in. Determine whether you'd prefer to work for an agency or as part of an in-house group within a business. This thinking will help you to create a hit-list of companies you'll contact.

2. Attend industry events and conferences

Meet industry folks and make important contacts. You will be able to learn about the industry and market through these events. Participate in local chapters of AIGA or the American Advertising Federation (or any other design groups in your market).

3. Find the right fit

Determine which organizations are a good fit for your creative talents, philosophy, or personality. This will ensure you know yourself and can narrow your search to a focused list of needs in your new career.

4. Treat your job search as a creative campaign

Consider the right approach for you. You may decide to invest your time on a promotional or direct mail piece. Or, you may choose to put your time into a website showcasing your work. Plan the steps that you will take to get to the interview stage, as the process doesn't stop there.

5. Tailor your cover letter

Invest time in a cover letter for each position and organization you are interested in. Demonstrate your understanding of the company, their philosophy, type of work, and why you are a good fit. Write your cover letter to introduce yourself, not simply a recap of your resume.

Get Up to Speed

Time to gently place your foot on the gas pedal. You hopefully have **lined up an interview or two** in your search and connections you've made with people. Now it's time to present yourself to potential employers.

1. Make a list of questions

Prepare for your interview by writing them down. It's normal to get a little flustered or nervous. These questions will allow you to demonstrate that you are invested in the organization and are looking for a good fit for your career.

2. Know your interviewer

Review the biography, blog, Twitter feed, or personal website of the person that will interview you. This is your chance to make a personal connection that your competitors may not be able to.

3. Present your portfolio

Demonstrate that you are able to verbalize your creative ideas by talking intelligently about your work. If you push your portfolio across the table, it is likely that a busy Creative Director will quickly go through your book and your meeting may be cut short.

4. Consider your wardrobe

Don't wear your "Sunday Best!" Do dress the way you plan to should you be hired. This is a great way to show your interviewer that you are professional and won't leave them guessing about how you really carry yourself day-to-day.

5. Ask permission to follow up

Show you are a great addition to the organization. The goal of your interview is to make an impression. Make a plan for your next communication with the hiring manager before you leave. This is a great way to demonstrate your motivation and professionalism.

Prepare to Merge

Now that you are up to speed, it's time to put on your blinker and get ready to change lanes. The time immediately after your interview is an opportunity that is often overlooked.

1. Follow up. Follow up. Follow up.

If you don't follow up, you miss the chance to sell yourself. After the meeting, determine why the organization is a good fit based on what you learned during your interview. If you've asked good questions, you have what you need to make the most of a follow up.

2. Demonstrate why it's the right job for you

Find overlap between your skill set, creative work, style, or personality that makes this the right job for you. Share this common ground in your communications with the hiring manager.

3. Differentiate with personality

Every communication is a chance to differentiate from the competition. By doing research or meeting people at events, you've created a reason to initiate a conversation, as you have something in common with them. This is a fine line, but a few subtle touches of personality can help to be more memorable.

4. Be honest

Know what you are good at and what you are not. Be very clear about what your skill set is. You're not proficient in Adobe InDesign if you've completed one project in the application.

5. Provide reference letters

By providing a list of reference letters, you are saving the hiring manager a step and showing your interest in the job. Be sure the references speak to your character, quality of work, and positive traits as a creative.

Accelerate to Cruising Speed

Now that you have safely merged, you still have some work to do in ensuring you are a part of the team you've joined.

1. Keep your eyes wide open

Now that you have joined a creative team, you have an opportunity to learn how the organization and industry works. Spend time with your peers, but also copywriters and account executives. Widen your view to the big picture, as it will help you become more valuable in your role.

2. Check your ego

We work for clients who represent a deep industry knowledge and first-hand experience of their customers. While they may not be creative, they have an important point of view that is of huge value to the work being done. Combine your view with a creative vision and an open mind to be successful in your new job.

3. Ask questions

Be sure to ask lots of questions. Many organizations will assume you are up-to-speed on all aspects of design and production. Make sure you clearly explain your abilities and set expectations with your supervisor. Then, exceed them.

4. Learn to collaborate

Playing well with others is crucial to surviving in this competitive career. Working with other creative people is a skill that is important to develop quickly. Being able to share ideas will only make them stronger and more marketable to your clients.

5. Design is a lifestyle

Stay up-to-speed with design trends and culture. Continue to strengthen your creative passion beyond what you do during the workday. Stay fresh.

As Students, you have honed your creative craft and built a great foundation of skills and knowledge. Incorporate these steps into your job search process and you will have a smoother ride. Once you are on the freeway, you can choose your route to move through your career.