

Sabb Outduction

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How to use this guide

As you come to the end of your time as a Sabb, you'll likely be thinking (or perhaps worrying) about next steps and life after being a Sabb.

Maybe you have plans or goals, perhaps you have a job or postgraduate study lined up, or maybe you have absolutely no idea at all. All of these responses are totally normal. You've just spent a year leading the way, advocating for change, representing students, and likely giving away much of yourself in the process. Please, if you can, take a few weeks off to get back to being who you really are. Rest, decompress, spend time with people you love, and do things that make YOU happy. You deserve it.

When you're ready to think about the world of work or postgraduate study, you can use this guide to help you reflect on your skills and experiences, build your CV/job applications, prepare for interviews, respond to job offers, and find the right future learning opportunities.

You can dip in and out of it at any time, selecting the resources and information that will work for you. You don't need to follow the guide in any order. You can come back to it whenever you need to, even years down the line if you'd still find it helpful.

I'll leave you with this quote from 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse' by Charlie Mackesy, 2019:

"Most of the old moles I know wish they had listened less to their fears and more to their dreams."

Life after being a Sabb

Beyond what to do with your career and further study, transitioning out of a full-time representational role can also come with a number of personal challenges. The section below includes a few pieces of advice around some of the main tension points.

Transitioning out from a leadership role

Sabbatical Officer roles are unique in that they offer access to some of the highest parts of the University's organisation structure that otherwise would be gated behind years (arguably decades) of career experience. Going from a position that operates at a high level and from having your opinions and perspective sought after down to a more operation-focused role (or to no role at all) can be extremely challenging. No longer being a part of high-level decision making and strategy and losing structured, regular contact with leaders of an institution can feel like you've taken a step down or can (by comparison) make your post-Sabbatical life seem less important.

Sabbatical roles are also very unique in that you don't have a set line manager, and operate with a high level of autonomy that likely won't be given to you in a lower-level role. This can come with feelings of losing control, or frustration in later workplaces where you're dependant on others to make decisions or allocate responsibility to you.

Coming from a position with a notoriously chaotic work/life balance, it can feel like there is a massively uneven gap in your life after finishing a Sabbatical year.

For this reason, some ex-Sabbs choose to take on full-time work as quickly as possible. Others take time to breathe and work out what they want in life. There's not a perfect "cure" for these feelings or for the change in structure in your personal and professional life, but here is some general advice about how to ground yourself following a Sabb term:

- First and most importantly, connect with the people you love and care about. Spending time with your loved ones can ground you in yourself and remind you of your human (not just your workplace/representational) value.
 - Relatedly, staying in close contact with the other student leaders you spent time with, going through past memories together, can help process and commemorate your experiences.
- Ask yourself questions about meaning and direction. What do you want to do? Why? What parts of being a Sabb enabled that? What parts of being a Sabb hindered or prevented you from achieving those goals? Regardless of whether it makes you money or not, what are some important milestones you're looking forward to in your life? (Creating something, being or living in certain places, having particular experiences, being a parent, working in a certain field...which of these apply to your life? What can you be excited about?).
- Consider exploring career paths that you may not have previously considered. Do you want to continue to work in higher education? Do you value the freedom and directional autonomy of being self-employed? Are there charities or organisations who advocate for causes that you care about? What about private sector opportunities, or ways to finance other elements of joy in your life?

Letting your successor fail or succeed

The blessing and the curse of student leadership is that someone else will be responsible for your role after you. The reality is, no two people will prioritise or lead from a Sabbatical role in exactly the same way. From the outside, it's easy to feel like whoever is in your role is

regressing or letting go of parts of the role that you think are important. A lot of the work you were doing can feel overwhelmingly important as you are leaving it. It's difficult to trust someone else to take that on, and it may feel like your legacy is being overridden. It's possible as well that you may feel overshadowed, or that a new person is getting more support, attention, or priority than you received. These are normal feelings and it's okay to feel them. It doesn't make you a bad or an unsupportive person.

The truth is, this is how students' associations change and grow. Despite what we see on TV and hear from leaders in a variety of fields, growth is very rarely linear. It requires some backtracking, mistakes, and new priorities and perspectives. The person in your role after you will have different context, challenges, and experiences than you, and that's *okay*.

As you leave, that's the time to make clear whether or not the person who comes after you can consult you for further perspective or advice. If you offer this, know that for a variety of reasons, they might not take you up on that. It's best to leave your successor with the option to approach you rather than coming back in to check on them unsolicited. As much as these roles are leadership experiences, they are also learning experiences; you can't help them to skip the essential steps of their own learning journey.

No matter what you might be feeling about what your successor is or is not doing, here is some advice:

- Try not to gossip or share your opinions too widely. This can come back to your successor, who may be hurt or undermined by your actions. Save your comments for a few trusted friends (perhaps your fellow ex-Sabbs, who can commiserate, or your non-Sabb friends who are more removed from the Union). Make clear to those you share with that you'd like them to keep your thoughts private.
- Reflect on your own term as a whole experience. Were there moments where you stumbled? Did those lead to new discoveries or insights that you wouldn't have otherwise gained? How would you have felt if a past-Sabb had intervened at one of those crucial points? Would you have developed into the person you are today without all of those experiences?
- Engage in life outside of the Union. Immersing yourself in things you care about will help put the problems you were grappling with into context. What seemed like life and death inside the Union can feel infinitesimally small upon later reflection. It may just take time for these issues to shrink back down to size in the broader context of your life, but they will rebalance themselves eventually.
- If you're feeling upstaged or inadequate by comparison, remind yourself that you – at the very least – created the environment for your successor to find the success they are currently having. Think about your own wins, or how your failures resulted in a shift in priorities. Your successor and you are on the same team, and you've both done incredible work to improve the lives of students in your community.

Feelings of incompleteness and continued passion

The end of your term may not necessarily feel like a distinct end. You may have projects you want to complete, or issue areas you feel you barely got to tackle. No one can achieve everything they want in one of these roles in a single year (or realistically, even two!)

You don't have to abandon or sideline your passion completely, but you also shouldn't harangue yourself for the things you didn't get done. Try to reflect positively and constructively about what you did achieve. A good approach is to look back with gratitude on

the successes you've had, and to look back on the incomplete parts as learning opportunities.

Here are some other ways you can go about tackling feelings of incompleteness or further passion, some of which might work for you:

- Get involved in issues that you care about. There are a huge number of charities and community organisations (and even workplaces) who are trying to improve people's lives in the way you've just been doing. Volunteer or find a job working on the things that matter most to you!
- Journal, write a story, or sketch (or any medium) how you would have handled or gone about something you didn't get done. Imagine what could have happened, how you could have approached it, and what your ideal outcome would have been. Give yourself closure and accept that there were reasonable limits outside of your control that mean you didn't get to do everything.
- Check back in with University leaders down the road. After a bit of time has passed, ask them if any progress has been made on one of your former priorities, or what they think the future might look like in that area. Maybe even schedule a quick check-in!

Dealing with change/uncertainty

Whether you have something lined up after your Sabb year or not, you may be feeling anxious about the next chapter in your life. Most of you will have finished your stint in Higher Education and you'll be preparing for the world of work. Even if you've still got a year of study left, you may still be worrying about leaving education and moving into the 'real world.' On that point, you've always been in the 'real world,' people just like to talk down to students/graduates about their experiences and invalidate them as if working for 10 years makes you some sort of life expert. It doesn't.

Change can be scary, whether it's a change you know you want/need, like accepting your dream job, or a change you're not yet sure about, like where you are now finishing up your Sabb term. Life is full of change and uncertainty; no one knows what the future holds, no one knows with absolute certainty how they're going to achieve their goals.

If you're someone who finds change or uncertainty unsettling or downright anxiety-inducing, I imagine you'll have thoughts such as:

- "What on earth am I doing?"
- "What am I going to do next?"
- "What am I qualified for? What jobs can I do well at?"
- "I'm really scared."
- "I don't know how I'm going to get from A to B."
- "Everyone else has it all figured out and I don't."
- "I don't know who I want to be."

Firstly, acknowledge and accept how you feel. Try and define it. Are you scared? Anxious? Upset? Frustrated? Now work out exactly what is making you feel this way. You could journal in the ways suggested above, or you could talk yourself through it out loud – if you talk yourself through it in your head it'll make you overthink and spiral. Ask yourself, "what is making me feel [X] right now? Why?"

Once you've got that, give yourself some self-compassion (see section on self-compassion) and confirmation that it's ok for you to feel how you feel such as:

- "It is ok for me to feel [X] about my future/about life after being a Sabb."
- "I do not have to have it all figured out."
- "In this moment, I am safe."

You can also remind yourself of times where you started something new and it all worked out, such as coming to study at university, or becoming a Sabb. This can act as 'evidence' against the spiralling thoughts and show yourself that you can handle this situation.

Talk it over with someone you trust. Everyone has experience of change and uncertainty that they will be able to reflect on with a bit more distance and objectivity. Tap into the advice and experiences of others around you, and allow it to reassure and uplift you. You don't have to handle it all on your own.

When you're ready, you can take small steps toward your next chapter. It will all be ok, and everything will make sense in the end.

Here are some resources that may help you:

- NHS: [How to deal with change and uncertainty](#)
- TedTalk: [The key to living a life of adventure](#)
- Bupa: [How to cope with uncertainty](#)

Taking the next step

Information banks

Prospects

- They have plenty of resources for graduates, including on [postgraduate](#) and [conversion studies](#), [what to do with your degree](#), and [advice to help you get a job](#). They also have resources on [working abroad](#), [gap years](#), and [self-employment](#).

Reed

- They host job listings, as well as online courses and careers advice including [CV templates](#), [interview techniques](#), and [personal statement advice](#)

TargetJobs

- Lots of detail on things like [interview and assessment centre skills](#), [CV writing](#), [options after a degree](#), and [postgraduate study](#). They also send round mailing lists of job openings.

Getting the job

CVs

CVs or resumé's are one of the main things employers tend to ask for when advertising jobs, so it's important to have a CV that accurately reflects your skills and experience so you can stand out from other candidates. Even if you are applying for a job that asks you to fill in an application form rather than a CV, it's still a really good idea to have a CV to draw from when it comes to filling out that application form.

If you are writing a CV as part of an application for postgraduate study, please refer to the 'Further Study' section for more relevant guidance.

Master CV vs job-specific CV

So, you've got all these qualifications, skills, and experiences, and now you need to distil the relevant ones neatly into a 2 page document. Being able to do this well starts with being able to remember all of the above in the first place, which is where the 'Master CV' comes in.

A Master CV is a document where you list ALL of your qualifications, skills, and experiences across your education, volunteering, and working life in detail (including that bar job you worked that summer between school and university). This will ensure that you have details of everything you've done in the last few years so you can pull out the relevant bits when it comes to writing a job or industry specific CV.

Here are some resources with more information and guidance on master CVs:

- [Indeed](#)
- [The GradSoc](#)

A job or industry specific CV is, as you might expect, more focused on a given area. If you're applying for a job as a graphic designer, you'll want to emphasise the relevant education and qualifications, as well as any roles where graphic design was a key element, and probably not place strong focus on unrelated things like your history A level or your work in a café. You want to make it as easy as possible for the selection panel to see why you would be good for the job, and prevent them from having to wade through detail about unrelated stuff.

Here are some templates with advice for writing role-specific CVs:

- [Prospects](#)
- [Indeed](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)

In general, make sure to include the following:

- Your name, email address, and phone number clearly, at the top of the page
- Educational history, starting with your most recent qualification.
- Employment history, starting with your most recent job.
 - Highlight your outputs/skills/experiences with measurable evidence.
 - Use strong action verbs when outlining your experiences.
 - Avoid using 'I' – just go straight in with verbs.
 - 'I managed a team of student volunteers' becomes 'Managed a team of 8 student volunteers to meet their strategic priorities.'
- Any work experience (volunteering), most recent role first.
- If you would like to include a skills section, pick a maximum of 5 of the most relevant skills which you will have already highlighted in the main body of your CV (usually in the employment history section). Any skills you list here need to be clearly evidenced in the body of the CV; this section is not the time to introduce new information.

Psychometric tests

If you're applying for grad schemes in particular, psychometric tests are a key aspect of the recruitment and selection process. These tests are designed to measure reasoning abilities as well as your personality to see if you're a good fit for the job. They can be quite daunting but you can get a good idea of the types of questions and the timing of them through practice. When applying for jobs or grad schemes with psychometric tests, it's wise to check if they give detail on the type of tests or the platform they will use so you can get the most efficient practice in.

There are a variety of platforms to find practice tests (some free, others paid), and you may have access to some resources via your university's careers service.

Here are some resources that may be helpful:

- Free practice tests from [TargetJobs](#)
- Free practice from [Prospects](#)
- Free practice tests from [SHL](#)
- Even more practice tests from [The Psychometric Project](#)

Identify your network

Having a network is a very useful tool throughout your career, and you will build it over time. People in your networks can be a phenomenal resource for advice, opportunities, and support to get jobs. This could include shared connections on LinkedIn, people you meet at conferences, people you studied with, and people you have worked or volunteered with.

As big as the world is, it can be really small too. Chances are, you are known of by many more people than you realise, even if people just know your name and most recent job role. This can be extremely helpful when trying to build a career and/or create a name for yourself in your chosen field. There are so many people out there who want to help you, even if you haven't met them yet; you never know when you might need to lean into your network for support.

You also never know when someone in your network will come in and support you and put golden opportunities in your path. If you need more convincing about networking:

- Harvard Business Review: [‘Build a Network – even when you don’t think you need one.’](#)
- Indeed: [‘The benefits of networking: 14 reasons to start your network.’](#)
- BetterUp: [‘What is networking and why is it so important?’](#)

Think about who you would like to keep in contact with when you leave the role, and why. You might keep in touch for multiple reasons including:

- You genuinely like and respect these people.
- They’d write a good reference.
- They’re high level players that have clout.
- They have a wealth of knowledge and experience in an industry/sector/topic area of interest to you.
- They’ve supported you in the past.
- They work on similar projects to you and you’d like to share practice.

I would really suggest that you think about this a little, and perhaps send some personalised ‘I’ve really enjoyed working with you’ emails. Ensuring it’s personalised and honest will make others feel valued – as you know yourselves, you get very little by way of thanks in this job, and emails like this really do mean a lot to people. You don’t have to do this for everyone you’ve ever worked with, but I would suggest you do that for people you would like to keep in contact with in some capacity. You never know when you may need these people, and giving them a good impression and some gratitude as you leave will ensure they have a lasting positive impression of you. It could be as simple as an email like:

“Hi X,

As I end my term as a Sabb, I would like to thank you for your support over the last year. I’ve really [enjoyed working with you on X, valued your advice on X issues, learnt a lot from you about X].

I would really like to keep in touch going forward [because you have a wealth of knowledge, because I value your insight, because I enjoyed working with you on X project and I’d love to know how it progresses].

Thank you for making my Sabb year a memorable one!”

Asking for references

Asking for references or support from people you’ve only known for a year may feel a bit daunting or even inauthentic. The truth is, however, there are many people who would be eager and honoured to help you. You’ve also engaged much more heavily with many stakeholders (e.g. directors of service units, senior managers) in a year than other students will engage with these leaders in their entire time at University.

It’s best to offer someone the chance to support you and let them decide for themselves rather than assuming they won’t or wouldn’t be willing to be a reference for you.

Here’s how to ask someone to be a reference for you:

- Start with a personalised introduction, akin to the template email above, where you describe why your connection with that person was meaningful to you.

- Conclude the personal preamble with a firm conclusion, something like, “I think you could really speak to my [skills/leadership/potential].”
- From there, move right into the ‘hard ask’: “Would you be willing to serve as a reference for me in my applications for future opportunities?”
- Avoid any temptation to down-play, equivocate, or otherwise soften the ask. Leave the question to speak for itself and see what they say. If you feel it’s necessary, you can add a short statement about how you’d help them (e.g. by sending along your CV and the job profile for things you’re applying to) if they were willing to serve as a reference.
- Otherwise, conclude with a thank you and stating that you’re excited to hear back from them soon.

(You can also, of course, tailor the above process to fit a specific job or timeline for an application rather than the “general ask” described above).

If you are asking for references in particular, here is a sample email you can use.:

“Throughout my Sabbatical Officer term, we worked closely on a number of projects and committees. I believe you would be well positioned to speak to my strengths, experience, and contributions. Are you willing to serve as a reference for me in future applications?”

I’d be happy to send over materials such as my CV and role descriptions for any opportunities I am applying if it would be of help to you as a reference.

Thank you,”

Keeping in touch

You can keep in touch in a few ways. You could connect on LinkedIn if they use it so you know if they change roles/places of work. It’s usually best to reach out via email to initiate contact. You could email something like:

“Hi [X],

I hope all is well with you.

I’m reaching out to see how you’re getting on, and how [X project] is going this year. [Say something personal about your experience working on that project].

I would really like to connect soon on Teams if you have time in the next few weeks, to [see how you’re doing, find out more about X, get your advice on X].”

It doesn’t need to be complicated, especially if you’ve worked with them a lot in the past and the experience was positive.

Interviews

Preparation

Congrats, you got to the interview stage! Now it’s time to get ready to shine, whether this is your first-choice job or not. No matter how you feel about this job opportunity, it’s important you prepare as well as you would if it were your dream job for a couple of reasons:

- 1) You never know, you might get to the interview and do a total 180 and discover you’re really keen to work there when you meet the panel.

- 2) This job might not be what you want, but you might look at other jobs in the same company or industry down the line, so it's important you make the best possible impression.
- 3) It demonstrates respect for the panel's time when you prepare well and engage with the interview.

Exactly how you should prepare will differ depending on the specification. Some interviews are just asking questions, others might include other elements such as asking you to make a short presentation on a given or chosen topic based on a brief.

We'll talk through how you can prepare for the core part of the interview; the questions.

1) Research the company/team/topic area:

Find out the answers to the following questions:

- How old is the company?
- Is it a family business? Who runs or owns it?
- Is it linked with another company/group?
- What are the company's core values?
- How large is the company?
- How large is the team you would be working in?
- What are the core projects you'd be working on?
- What is the topic area about?
- How does the topic/project fit in with your own values and prior experience?
- What are some of this organisation's current strengths and challenges?

This will give you some good context, and help you answer questions such as:

- What do you already know about this company/team/topic area?
- Why did you apply for this job?
- Why do you want to work with us?
- What makes you a good fit for this job/team/project/company?

Other things to check on for your own knowledge which may help you make your decision whether you want to take this job:

- How many hours per week are you expected to work? Will this fit with your needs?
- Are you expected to work weekends or evenings? Does this appeal to you?
- How long is the contract? If it's fixed term 6 months can you handle that you'll have to begin the job hunt all over again so soon?
- Alongside the salary, what are the benefits of this job?
 - Pensions and company shares.
 - Flexible working
 - Private health insurance.
 - Mental health support.
 - Clearly defined personal and professional development opportunities.
 - Care leave.
 - Parental or adoption leave
 - Paid annual leave.
 - Overtime policy.
 - Sick leave and pay.

2) Go back and look at the job advertisement.

Look at the person specification, highlight and make notes on how you already meet their essential and desirable criteria. Make notes of how you can show you meet these criteria based on your qualifications, skills, and experience (voluntary and paid). Think particularly about projects as key examples for this. Here's an example piece of a person specification for a role in a student association, and how you could theoretically apply your experiences to it when considering applying for the role. You should go through job advertisements and work out where you can clearly demonstrate that skill, where you can demonstrate it to an extent, and where you cannot clearly demonstrate it yet.

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
1. Good working understanding of representative and democratic environment		X
2. Knowledge of the issues facing students and Higher Education	X	
3. Ability to lead, motivate and inspire student officers and volunteers		X
4. Excellent verbal and written communication skills	X	
5. Ability to develop and maintain complex stakeholder relationships		X

- 1) As a Sabb, you will have operated under student representative councils/equivalents, and played a key role in student democracy. You could talk about a time when you brought forward motions, or when you had to make decisions about student officers or how elections should operate.
- 2) Depending on your role, you will have an awareness of various student issues and experiences, from student extra-curriculars, to issues in their academic experience, to wellbeing and EDI, to sports, and everything else in between. Think about the projects you led on, working groups you sat in, and times you consulted with students and what these experiences taught you.
- 3) You can talk about how you motivated student officers as a Sabb on specific project areas (like Freshers Week stalls, SHAG Week, getting volunteers to encourage students to vote). You could also talk about any relevant volunteering experience you had too (not everything needs to be applied to your time as a Sabb!)
- 4) You can probably show this through your academic career (writing essays, delivering presentations) as well as during your time as a Sabb (such as literacy in social media or all-student emails). Try and find a concrete example, such as a particular talk you had to give, or a feedback and engagement exercise you ran with students.
- 5) Having been a Sabb, you'll probably have this in spades! Think about specific examples of this; how about a time when you had to balance student feedback with the wishes of the university or students' association. How did you balance these, what compromises did you reach, and what was the outcome?

Remember, no one is 100% qualified for any job; a lot of the time you're probably only 80% right for the job on paper at the time of applying. Do not let this prevent you from applying for a job you like the sound of. You need to leave space for growth and challenge, otherwise there's nothing the role can teach you and you'll get bored in the role.

Take a look at the core responsibilities and note where you can show you've done a version of this before, and where you haven't so it would be a suitable level of challenge and growth from past experience.

Research the key projects/topic areas you are expected to work on so you've got plenty of background information at your fingertips. If it's a particular project, research the answers to questions such as:

- How long is the project? When does it start and when is it projected to end?
 - If it has already begun, which phase is it in now and which phases are left?
- Who are the key groups/stakeholders involved? This includes funders.
 - What are their perspectives and values?
 - What sorts of work have they been involved in before/what is their industry?
- Who will be impacted by this work?

3) Prepare some core question answers.

Some questions will be more generic and some will be more specific to the person specification, role description, and your CV or job application. Go back to the job description and the work you've done on your CV to show your skills and experiences. Have a couple of project options to discuss so you don't reuse the same experiences time and again.

Generic questions:

- What drew you to the job?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?
- Tell me about an accomplishment you're particularly proud of.

For more specific questions, you'll want to use the STAR method:

- **Situation:** Briefly introduce the situation to provide context.
- **Task:** Describe the task. What needed to be done and why.
- **Action:** Outline the action(s) you took to tackle the task.
- **Response/Result:** Explain what happened as a result of your action(s).

Here are some questions you might need the STAR method for:

- Tell me about a time when you failed and how you dealt with it.
- Tell me about a key success in your previous role.
- This job requires you to work with multiple stakeholders. How have you managed complex stakeholder relationships previously?
- How have you used [skill from job description] in the past?

- You mentioned you worked as a team of Sabbatical Officers. Tell me about a time when this teamwork was essential.
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a manager [or colleague] and how you dealt with it.
- How do you motivate yourself when work is monotonous?
- Describe a time where you had to creatively solve a problem.
- Describe a time when you had to make a tough decision in a short amount of time.
- How do you handle work stresses and pressures?
- Tell me about a time when you improved an aspect of service in a previous role.

Practise your answers out loud, as cringe as that is. You could time yourself to make sure you're not taking ages with each answer: 2 minutes is probably plenty for a more in-depth question. Much more than that and you risk going off-track and not focusing on the key points.

Practise with a friend if you like, and they'll be able to give you feedback on the content of your answer and things like your body language and how you came across. If you're not comfortable with that, you could video yourself or just do a voice recording. That way, you'll know if you went off on a tangent and never got back on track.

“Tell me about yourself.”

This is not a cool question to find out about your hobbies and family life, they want to know the key points of your relevant experience and why you are applying for the role.

For example, you're applying for a job working with the Scottish Government on spiking campaigns and legislation and they ask you the dreaded question. Here's how you could answer it:

“I worked as a Sabbatical Officer with a focus on student wellbeing and equality issues. This post was varied in terms of both projects and responsibilities; I was a key player in writing the Association Strategy, I led on projects including SHAG Week, and I oversaw volunteer officers whose remits fit within wellbeing and equalities. I found this a rewarding experience, particularly working on safety and GBV prevention. I was involved in a Ministerial Roundtable on spiking prevention providing insight based on my experience as both as student and a charity trustee. I developed greater knowledge around spiking prevention in the night-time economy and in informal group social settings, and am keen to continue this work in this role.”

4) Take care of yourself

Interviews are scary because you're putting yourself in a position to be judged by other people. You may come up against limiting beliefs, lack of confidence, or just plain worry, stress, or anxiety. Please know that all of this is normal.

If you feel like your nerves are turning into negative self-talk, you might find flipping the script helpful, such as:

- “This job is a big step up and I don't think I can do this.” = “I have faced challenges before such as [X] and I am more than capable of putting myself forward for this opportunity.”

- “I’m not intelligent enough for this.” = “I have a degree and as a Sabbatical Officer I educated much more senior and experienced staff on key aspects of the student experience.”
- “I’m so young I’m not qualified for this.” = “If they weren’t interested in my skills and experience they would not have offered me an interview.”

It’s important to remind yourself that you are capable of doing scary things. The best way to do this is to recall concrete examples as ‘evidence’ of how competent you are, and return to those examples in moments of doubt.

If you enjoy an affirmation, here’s a couple you could try:

- I am capable.
- I am worthy of success.
- My potential is limitless.
- I see my worth even in the face of adversity.
- I am capable of more than I give myself credit for.
- I am ready for any challenges.
- I am kind to myself in moments of doubt.
- I am safe.
- I am supported.

5) Other preparations

Another way to support yourself is to take some of the stress away by making sure you know where the interview will be held. Do a Google Maps check of the location to see how long it will take you to get there and what (if any) public transport you should take. You might even do a recce in the days leading up to the interview so you can be confident you know where the venue is and how to get there.

[If your interview is online](#), tidy the space you will take your interview in. This will help you present a good impression of yourself to the panel, and probably reduce some stress for you if at least part of your space is tidy. If you live with others and they are likely to be at home during your interview, tell them about your interview so they know to be quiet during that time. Make sure your laptop is fully charged and any updates are sorted so your laptop won’t decide to do a spontaneous software update mid-interview.

If the interview is on a platform you’re unfamiliar with, make sure you try it out in advance of the interview so you know how it works. Check out:

- How to enter/open meetings
- How to mute yourself and put your camera on
- How to share your screen
- How to exit the meeting
- How to alter any settings as necessary

Practice relaxation techniques, whatever works for you. Make sure to do things that you find restorative and fun in the lead up to an interview to help you keep calm and remember that you are more than the outcome of this interview (or your career for that matter).

Try and get a good sleep the night before as best you can. It will help you to not only feel rested but also on a more even keel emotionally for the following day.

The day arrives.

What to wear

- Dress more formally even if you think it's going to be quite informal – smart casual at minimum like nice trousers/skirt, nice top, blazer (which you can always take off if it is really informal).
- Make sure that whatever you wear feels comfortable. If you are physically comfortable you are more likely to come across as confident and in control. It also helps to wear clothes that you like or at least don't hate, as you'll feel much more comfortable.

Other behavioural points

- Give yourself plenty of time to get there:
 - Leave earlier so you can make sure you're in the area nice and early. It will also reduce any stress if there are any roadworks/public transport delays or changes.
 - [If it's online](#), make sure you've got the meeting invitation or Zoom link in plenty of time so you can ask for it if you don't have it already.
- If you're starting to panic, try to remember that you are capable and you have a wealth of evidence and experience to prove this to yourself. You could try some square breathing (in for 3, hold for 3, out for 3, hold for 3 and so on), some affirmations, or whatever works for you.
- Be overly courteous to reception and cleaning staff. You never know how that might get back to the hiring panel. It will also make your life easier if you do get the job as you'll be on the right foot with everyone.
- Be more enthusiastic than you feel – the good thing is that anxiousness and excitement can feel pretty similar so it won't be too much of a stretch.
- Some people say, 'be yourself' others say, 'don't be yourself.' I'd aim for being the version you are when you are most confident and content. It's not lying or deceptive if you emphasise your good points or show how you would be on a really good day.

The interview itself

[Harvard Business Review](#) suggests that as an interviewee, it's important you highlight your competence, rather than just your experience (though experience can be linked to competence). Let's now assume you've followed all the advice above and you've prepared for this opportunity in depth.

If this job is a bit more of a stretch or it's in a very different environment to where you've been previously, you should clearly show the panel how adaptable you are and how you have made an impact elsewhere. You should highlight transferable skills that would be relevant to this new role, demonstrating how you've used them already and how you plan to use them in this role.

Remember all the preparation you did and try to put it into practice. Don't worry if things go off-kilter or you're asked a question you didn't prepare for, just try your best to highlight your skills, competence, and experiences as calmly as you possibly can.

It's ok to have a short pause before answering a question; in fact, it's better to pause and trot out a coherent answer than a response that's all over the place. Take a breath to calm your nerves and gather your thoughts, and then do your best with your response.

‘Do you have any questions for us?’

This is your time to subtly interview the job to see if it’s what you want. It also shows your interest in the role/company. You can ask more specific questions or those that follow up on anything mentioned in the interview. A note: [Harvard Business Review](#) suggest you do not ask about things like salary, pensions, or other benefits such as healthcare at the interview stage. You can ask and negotiate about these once you have the offer under your belt (and you’ll have [a better chance of successfully negotiating](#) that way). If they ask you about [salary expectations in the interview](#), of course respond, but it’s not necessarily advisable to ask about these things at the initial interview stage.

Here are some more [general questions](#) you could ask:

- In your capacity as [X role], what do you find most rewarding about working here?
- What are your expectations for me in this role?
- Could you tell me about the review/appraisal process here? How often will my performance be reviewed and against what metrics?
- What are the biggest challenges I can expect to face in this team/this company?
- How do you see this role growing and developing over the next [X] period?

You can personalise it by addressing people with their names. That kind of personal approach is really memorable and is a handy way of creating connection.

Even if you don’t feel you have any, it’s important to ask a question or two. Your questions are typically your “last impression” that you’ll leave the panel with as the interview concludes. The more specific and personalised you can make these questions, the more invested and knowledgeable you’ll come across.

Post interview etiquette

It can be a good idea to [follow up after an interview](#), whether it went well or not, irrespective of whether you want the job or not.

It doesn’t need to be complicated, just a short email to show you valued their time can be a way to make a lasting positive impression. Alternatively, you can skip this until they come back to you with an interview outcome, but make sure to verbally thank them at the end of the interview. Go with what you feel is right at the time.

You can also send an email if time has passed and you have not yet heard back, saying something like:

“Dear Name/hiring panel/HR,

I interviewed for [X] position on [date], and I just wanted to check in to see if the hiring decision has been made at this time.

I valued the opportunity to interview with your company, and would love to know if the position has been filled.”

Doing these sorts of follow-up emails shows that you are interested in working in that company and will make you more memorable if there is another hiring opportunity in the future. Courtesy like that always pays off down the line, even if you didn't get that job.

Job offers.

Working out if it's the right job for you.

It's important once you get a job offer to think it through and work out if it's the right job for you. You should not accept a job offer and then go back on that, as you will technically be in [breach of contract](#). Apart from that, it is quite rude and suggests a lack of consideration for the employer's time. It's important to maintain a positive impression in case you want to interview for that same company down the line, or you end up interviewing with the same people at another firm. It is much better to ask for time to consider an offer than backtrack.

If you have received multiple offers, you're waiting for another interview, or you're just weighing up your options, explain what's going on and ask for more time if you need it. You can do this by saying something to the effect of:

"Thank you for the job offer. Would it be possible to get a summary of the details via email? I'd really appreciate a day or two to think things over/talk things over with my partner."

Many employers will understand that you may need time to consider the offer within a wider context, so ask for it if you need to. At this point, you can explain if you have another offer which you need to weigh up, and this may prove to be a good opportunity for tactfully negotiating the job offer against the other.

If you have another [interview/couple of interviews lined up](#) in the next few days that you'd like to attend (or it's literally tomorrow morning and it's too late to cancel), it's advisable to indicate to the recruiter that you may need more time to consider the situation. You can use some of the excuses above, and/or you can ask when the company would like your reply by. You don't want to come across as not invested in the role you have just been offered, but it is important to let the company know that you would like some time to think things through.

They will likely give you a few days to think things through, but they won't wait forever, especially if your other interview is a little while away. In cases like those, you'll need to make a clear decision on what you would like to do.

Questions to think about or ask before accepting an offer:

Here are some [basic questions](#) to think about or find out more about:

- **Admin:** what is the salary and benefits package? (As noted above, ask about this at the offer stage, not before). What is the proposed start date, and if necessary is there any wriggle room (for example if you would have to relocate or if you have another responsibility on that date that you cannot get out of)?
- **Role and responsibilities:** is there anything you don't understand about what your usual activities would involve?
- **Long-term progression:** is the contract permanent? If not, is it likely to be extended? What development/training/promotion opportunities are there?
- **Location:** will you need to relocate? If so, will you be able to afford the cost of living in this place? Will you have time to find a place to live? Do you want to relocate to this place?

- **Travelling to work:** how long will it take you to get to work? Is the public transport regular enough (if relevant)? Will you be able to park your car close by if you're commuting?
- **Working patterns:** is hybrid working offered? Are you happy with fully office/fully remote/hybrid working? Is there flexibility?
- **Hidden costs:** new clothes to fit the new job, greater travel expenses, takeaways if you're working long hours.

The bigger (and more difficult questions):

Is this role compatible with my goals?

- This can be about career trajectory, financial goals (saving for a house, holidays, savings, pensions, supporting family currently or in the future) and other goals.
- It can also be a goal to just get a stable job to pay the bills and facilitate the rest of your life.
- It's ok to accept jobs as a means to an end, not every job will be the dream job.

Do I need to accept this job for now due to financial or other reasons?

- This is a really important consideration that you may need to evaluate quite deeply. We'd never advocate you taking a job you know from the get-go that you'll hate, but we do appreciate that not everyone will have the option to wait for something better to come along.
- If you do have to take a job you don't want purely for financial or other reasons, you need to work out if you will have time to look for better jobs on the side. You don't want to get stuck somewhere that is soul-crushing without actively looking for an escape route on the side.
- Ultimately, you deserve to be in a job that you enjoy, whether you find the work itself rewarding, or whether the benefits of the job are what you're most drawn to.

How will this job impact my life and the people around me? Am I ok with this?

- How you answer this question will vary depending on your stage in life and your family/personal life circumstances, for example if you have a long term partner, children, or caring responsibilities.
- If none of the above apply to you, you might think about:
 - Will I be happy with the working hours?
 - Will I have enough time to do the things I enjoy outside of work?
 - How do I think my health will be impacted by this job?

Am I going to be happy in this job?

- And if not, what would make me happy if I decided to still take on this job?
- You can fill your life with moments of joy and happiness, both big and small, whether the job is the dream job or not.
- Work can be the place you go to be able to pay the bills and afford to do cool things in the rest of your life.

Accepting a job offer

You've weighed up all your options and you're confident that you want to [accept the job offer](#).

Exactly how you should accept the offer will depend on what instructions the recruiter has given you. If they called you to offer you the job, call them to accept it. Likewise, if they emailed you, email them back when you have made your decision.

Whichever method you use to accept the offer, make sure you show genuine enthusiasm and excitement to start working in that team.

Accepting over the phone

You can keep it short and sweet with:

“Hello [X], that’s wonderful news! I would love to accept the job offer and I’m excited to start. Thank you for the opportunity.”

Accepting via email

If you’d prefer to email and that’s the established mode of communication between yourself and the recruiter, respond to their offer with something like:

“Subject line: [Your name] – Acceptance of job offer.

Dear [X],

Thank you for offering me the role of [X]. I can confirm that I’d like to accept the offer. Please let me know of the next steps and if there is any more information I can supply you with at this stage.

Thank you for the opportunity, I look forward to working at the company.”

Declining a job offer

Recruiters will not take you declining a job offer personally, and they will actually be pleased if you are up front about it in good time, rather than accepting and then going back on your decision.

As with accepting an offer, it’s important to decline a job offer as soon as you are sure you do not want to take the offer. Be professional and courteous when you decline the offer as you never know, in a few years you might cross paths with HR from that company again.

Declining over the phone

Keep it simple:

“Hello [X], I’ve accepted an offer from another company/my plans have changed so I am not able to accept the offer of [X role] unfortunately. Thank you for taking the time to interview me and for offering me the position.”

They may ask you why you are declining the offer to see if there is anything they could improve on in the future. You don’t need to give detailed feedback, but any comments will be helpful, even if it’s just a simple “the role I have just accepted suits me/my lifestyle/my goals better.” You can also say if any of the following applied:

- You found the interview process tricky/off-putting,
- The salary doesn’t meet what competitors are offering,
- You would prefer to work in a different industry,
- The culture of the organisation doesn’t seem like a good fit for you,

- You've decided to do a full-time masters/PhD,
- You're taking a year out.

As always, it's imperative that you're professional (i.e. if the job looked rubbish, don't tell them that in those terms).

Declining by email

Again, keep it simple:

"Subject line: [Name] – Job Offer

Dear X,

Thank you for the interview on [date]. I enjoyed meeting you and the rest of the panel. I appreciate your generous offer of [X role]. After careful consideration, [my plans have changed/I have decided to take another role at a different company/I am going to undertake further full-time study] and so I must decline your offer.

Thank you for your time throughout the recruitment process. I wish you and the company all the best for the future."

Coping with failure/disappointment

Reminders

Failure is a normal part of life, but it is painful. If you don't get to the interview stage for a job you want, or you get an interview but you don't get an offer, please remember that it is just one opportunity of many.

I am a firm believer that rejection is redirection to jobs/situations/environments/people who are better suited to you and your goals.

Here are a couple of other things to remember:

- **Not every job has to be a dream job.** Your 'dream job' will change depending on your experiences to date, your current and future goals, your stage in life, and your personal life. You can have lots of 'dream jobs' throughout your life, just as you can have a couple of 'meh' jobs and jobs which are frankly really bad.
- **If you don't try you'll never know.** It's always worth throwing your hat in the ring and seeing what happens, rather than regretting not trying. Even if you don't hear back, they may still remember your name and skills, and if you apply to the company again down the line that will really help.
- **Accepting you did the best you could on the day in those circumstances.** Wishing it was a different day, that you'd slept more, or that you'd prepared more won't change the outcome, but it can help you for future opportunities and be a useful reminder of steps you can take to set you up for a better outcome. Remember that you can only do your best on a given day with a given set of circumstances. Berating yourself for not doing better is really unfair on yourself. You did a great job just getting through the interview!
- **Just because you're not the right fit for that role/company/team, doesn't mean you won't be the right fit elsewhere.** As the saying goes, "if you were everyone's cup of tea, you'd be a mug." Not everyone is going to like you and you're not going to like everyone either. You will find your people and environment, it may just take some trial and error.

- **You can find other things in life meaningful, not just your work.** You can also find that your work isn't that meaningful for what it is; the financial independence it allows can be the meaningful part. Other ways to find meaning in life might include:
 - **Small moments of joy:** sun through the trees, the first frost, birdsong on a summer evening, warm sweet treats from the oven, trying a new recipe.
 - **Connection with others:** spending time with friends, family/chosen family, time with pets, connecting with strangers at the bus stop.
 - **Fun stuff:** concerts, festivals, going to new places, learning new things, spending time alone reconnecting to yourself.
 - **The bigger things:** spirituality (whatever that means to you), building a home and a family if that's what you want, ticking something off your bucket list.

How to approach failure practically

Think about what you've learnt as a result of a failure or rejection, such as:

- I now know that I don't want to work in that industry.
- I now know I prefer face to face interviews over online ones.
- I tend to be better at morning interviews than afternoon ones.
- When I wear X clothes, I feel less/more confident.
- I really didn't like the vibe I got from that panel/person/company/environment.
- I needed to prepare better for surprise or difficult questions.
- I didn't show off my skills as much as I could've done.
 - For this, see [hard vs soft skills](#) for ideas of other things to mention.
- I didn't research the company enough so I couldn't meaningfully answer the question 'so what do you already know about our company?'

Any learning you can gain is helpful and you will be able to make use of it in your next interview or other opportunity.

Responding to a rejection

Unless the rejection email clearly states, "we are unable to provide feedback," feel free to [ask for feedback](#). They may still not give you any feedback, but you lose nothing by asking. Here's an email template:

"Subject line: Interview feedback request – [Name]"

Dear [Name],

Thank you for considering me for the role of [X], and thank you for the positive experience interviewing with you and the rest of the panel. I really valued the opportunity to learn more about the work you do at [X company].

I would really appreciate any feedback you are able to give me that might help me improve for future applications.

Thank you in advance for your time."

Hopefully they will get back to you with something, even if it's quite generic. I would limit follow ups to one email a week or two later. After that I would leave it and assume they cannot prioritise this feedback.

If they state from the beginning they cannot offer feedback, you can still email and say:

“Dear [Name],

Thank you for considering me for the role of [X], and thank you for the positive experience interviewing with you and the rest of the panel. I really valued the opportunity to learn more about the work you do at [X company].

I wish you and the company all the best for the future.”

Remember not to take rejection personally. It could simply be that someone came in and really gelled with the panel, or they came in with a totally fresh perspective that excites them. It often isn't really about you, it's about the company and what they need. Please refer to my 'if you were everyone's cup of tea, you'd be a mug' comment.

Here are some more suggestions of how you can approach failure and rejection:

- [Reed: How to deal with interview rejection](#)
- [Reed: 5 things you should never do if you don't get the job](#)

Self-compassion

Self-compassion is a term coined by Dr Kristin Neff, and is simply turning compassion around to yourself. You might think about this as treating yourself like you would a friend, family member, or someone else you care about. Practising self-compassion can be difficult, especially when struggling with other things at the same time.

Part of self-compassion is positive self-talk. After an interview rejection, you'll possibly be feeling quite low, you'll be overthinking, and you'll have probably forgotten all your unique and amazing skills and capabilities. What would you say to someone you love if they said they were upset about the same thing? You'd probably say something like “it's ok to feel what you're feeling now, but it was just one job opportunity. It doesn't make you less capable/clever/good at what you do. There will be other opportunities and you will do better next time.” Bring that compassion back to yourself.

Here are some other examples of self-compassion affirmations:

- “It's ok that I feel disappointed/sad that I didn't get that job.”
- “What I feel is valid.”
- “I deserve to find great opportunities.”
- “My worth is not defined by my failures/mistakes/disappointments.”
- “I don't have to listen to my negative self-talk. I choose to treat myself with loving kindness.”
- “I have a lot to offer to the world.”

We're all our own worst critics because we all want to be the best we can be, whatever that looks like for us. We sometimes forget we're human, we make mistakes, we have bad days. When these things happen, remind yourself that it's ok to feel what you're feeling, and remind yourself that you are worthy, capable, and that you're doing the best you can.

Here are some resources you may find helpful:

- [Guided exercises and practices](#) from Dr Kristin Neff
- [‘A 5-minute self-compassion break’](#) from Mindful
- [‘Self-compassion for the self-critical’](#) from Susan David
- [‘Dare to rewire your brain for self-compassion’](#) TED talk
- [‘How to be kinder to yourself’](#) from Susan David
- [How to manage your mental health whilst job seeking](#) from Reed

Further study

You may be thinking about taking on a postgraduate level degree either now or in the future.

You may study full-time or part-time depending on your needs, including studying online as more and more traditional providers look to expand their online learning portfolios.

Generally, applying for a masters is a lot less cut-throat than applying to an undergraduate degree as you'll have already proved (or be in the process of proving) your academic record. You'll also have some references from your lecturers too, as well as 3 or 4 extra years' experience in education, and therefore 3 or 4 years honing subject-specific and transferable skills. In addition, universities are only too happy to take the ~£10,000+ in tuition fees...

Benefits of doing a PG qualification

Gaining postgraduate qualifications can be a really enhancing and enriching experience for various reasons including:

- **Further exploring an area you already have experience in.** You likely took this subject or an adjacent subject at undergraduate level, so you can be fairly confident that you will enjoy the challenge of learning about the subject at a more challenging level.
- **Convert to another discipline.** You may now realise that you would like to change direction entirely and try a different subject area. Many people take conversion courses when they realise their undergraduate degree was insufficient to get them a foothold the career they're now interested in. Conversion courses can condense a lot of content into one year in a fast-track route, or they can be more spread out, it really depends.
- **You have to get a PG qualification to get into or progress on your career path.** This is true especially of things like teaching and law (if you did not do the course at undergrad). If you have a career in mind, make sure you check out if a PG qualification is a requirement, or is strongly encouraged. Some employers may support you to get a PG qualification, and some grad schemes include a PG qualification with them, such as the [NHS Management Training Scheme](#).

Considerations

Like anything in life, you need to weigh up the benefits and drawbacks before making a major decision. You should think about the following:

- Do I really want to do this? Will I be able to cope with the additional stress and pressure of studying at a high level?
- How will this impact other plans I have?
- If relevant, how will this impact my family/partner/others I need to factor in?
- Can I afford it? Is there funding for tuition and maintenance?
- Is it even necessary? Do employers care that much?
- Which mode of study is right for me?
- Which provider should I go with?

Only you can answer these questions, and only you can come to the decision.

Types of courses

Taught courses

These are generally masters degrees which can take 1 or 2 years full-time, 2-3 years part-time, after which time you will come out with an MA, MSc, or MLitt. Your time will be spent in a similar way to your undergrad, in that you will have lectures, tutorials, coursework, presentations, group work, possibly exams, and a dissertation/thesis. There will be greater expectations on the quality of your academic work compared to undergrad. As with undergraduate degrees, there are tuition fee costs which you would have to meet either through a postgraduate loan, scholarship, or off your own back.

Example courses offered in Scotland:

- MSc Archaeology at University of Edinburgh
- MSc Applied Psychology at Robert Gordon University
- MSc Civil Engineering at University of Dundee
- MLitt Publishing Studies at the University of Stirling
- MSc Web Technologies at the University of the Highlands and Islands

Research courses

PhDs

You can start a PhD straight after your undergraduate degree or a masters course. You will intensely research a given topic with a supervisor to produce a thesis and thesis defence presentation (sometimes called a viva). Depending on discipline and funding, some PhDs may be funded by groups in industry not just academia. PhDs can be 3-4 years full-time, or 4-6 years part-time.

You can apply for fully funded PhD studentships (projects that already have funding for your fees and your stipend), or come up with your own proposals and seek to get funding for it (with support from a supervisor).

You can use websites such as [FindA PhD](#) to search for available opportunities. It's also worth following individual academics or academic Schools on professional social media spaces to find out about opportunities and connect when it comes to writing your application.

Masters by research

These courses last 1-2 years full-time, or 2-4 years part-time and you will come out with an MRes, MPhil, MSc, or MA. These will have a much smaller teaching component, and will focus instead on producing a thesis, possibly with a thesis defence presentation. As with undergraduate degrees, there are tuition fee costs which you would have to meet either through a postgraduate loan, scholarship, or off your own back.

Example courses offered in Scotland:

- MRes Business and Management at the University of Stirling
- MSc Advanced Computer Science at Heriot-Watt University
- MSt (Res) in History at the University of St Andrews
- MSc by Research Life Sciences at the University of Dundee
- MPhil (Research) Media and Cultural Policy at the University of Glasgow

Conversion courses

[Conversion courses](#) can be completed over varying lengths of time depending on the course and your study preferences, from a couple of months to a couple of years. These are taught courses which are suitable if you have never studied this discipline before and you want to explore a career in this area, as they can be fast-tracked. As with undergraduate degrees, there are tuition fee costs which you would have to meet either through a postgraduate loan, scholarship, or off your own back.

Example courses offered in Scotland:

- MSc Business Analytics at the University of Stirling
- Conversion in Philosophy (Graduate Diploma) at the University of St Andrews
- Psychology (Conversion) MSc at the University of Dundee

Microcredentials

[Microcredentials](#) are individual modules that give you a qualification as they are. They are mostly offered online and last for a few months. These can be particularly good as part of your continued professional development. These may be structured as on-demand learning so you don't have to attend classes at a specific time. Some are free, some have a cost attached.

Some microcredential providers:

- [The Open University](#)
- [University of Glasgow](#)
- [University of Essex](#)
- [University of Birmingham](#)

Short courses

You may also see options for short courses, which again may be online and take a few weeks or months to complete. You may be able to add these modules together if you wish to count towards another qualification to support your professional development. There are often costs attached.

Short course providers:

- [University of Aberdeen](#)
- [UCL](#)
- [Kings College London](#)
- University of Edinburgh [short courses](#) and free [short online courses](#)
- [University of Oxford](#)

Applying for postgraduate study

Personal statements.

No one likes writing a personal statement. They feel cringe and it can feel difficult/uncomfortable to share your achievements and skills in this way. However, these are often an essential aspect of a postgraduate application, so it's worth putting time and effort into getting yours right. Remember: you have a lot of skills and experience to talk about.

Check any instructions about word or character count, but usually these should be about 1 side of A4 in length. You should avoid cliches, unnecessary information, or flowery sentences that do nothing to support your claims that you are a fantastic candidate for the programme. A great personal statement will include:

- Why you want to study at that institution.
- Why you want to study that course.
- Relevant career goals.
- Your academic achievements and how they make you eligible for this course.
- Other skills you have acquired and how these will support you to complete the programme successfully.

You can use the skills exercises at the end of this document to help you work out the particular skills you may wish to highlight. What's most relevant will depend on the course you are applying for, but you should absolutely highlight your academic achievements (degree classification, awards or scholarships, results in relevant modules) and transferable skills such as analysis, time management, critical thinking, ability to be self-directed etc.

Give yourself time to proofread your statement, and get a friend and/or careers adviser to give it the once over. Check out the following guides for more suggestions:

- [Prospects](#) guide to postgraduate personal statements
- [TargetJobs](#) guide to postgraduate applications

As a general piece of advice: for postgraduate applications (unlike job applications) your covering letter is rarely going to be the determining factor that gets you into the programme. Cover letters can, however, be the reason you are *rejected* from a programme. For this reason, it's better not to put anything disqualifying or excessive into a cover letter. Avoid name-dropping, over-inflating your experience or interests, or telling many personal anecdotes. Keep it simple, professional, and achievement focused.

CVs for postgraduate study

As you might expect, you should place greatest focus on your academic achievements and educational experiences when writing a CV for postgraduate study. The caveat to this would be if your undergraduate course was very different to the course you are applying for a postgrad in; you should still focus on your education, but you could balance it with any employment or volunteering experience which demonstrates competence in that area of study.

In terms of your education section, make sure you mention things like:

- **Your degrees in chronological order.** Note the classification, provider, duration, dissertation title and supervisor's name.
- **Any scholarships or awards and what they were awarded for**, such as academic achievement over a certain grade.
- **Any relevant modules** and your grades for those.
- **Any professional journal publications**, with the full name properly referenced with the authors' names and journal name, including a link to the piece. If this was a funded project you should note that too and where the funding came from.

In your experience section, include things like:

- **Most relevant work experience in chronological order with the key aspects and outputs.** You can use the exercises at the end of this document to help you with this. Also note basic things like how long you worked there and the job title.
- **Demonstrating teaching experience** may be useful especially for PhD applications as many PhD students teach other students.

- **Any conference presentations**, with the full name of your piece, the name and date of the conference and a link to any online material.

There are plenty of online guides about writing a CV for a postgraduate application:

- [University of Bath](#)
- [University of Oxford](#)
- [University of Manchester](#)
- [University of Birmingham](#)
- [Indeed](#)

Referees

When applying for a postgraduate degree after an undergraduate degree, it's best to provide academic referees, most likely your supervisor, or any other academics you worked closely with on projects or volunteering experiences. It's usually most relevant to focus on your academic experience when writing your application, which is why you should provide academic referees.

If the course is a conversion course which aligns more with your experience as a Sabb (or other professional experience), you could provide a reference from that time to corroborate that you are suited to this course. Ideally, your references for postgraduate study should be from teaching/research staff in your discipline of study, however.

Research proposal

If you are applying for a research degree you will need to write a research proposal on the given topic. It is always wise to reach out to the supervisor(s) named on the project to let them know you are interested and ask any questions you may have. A proposal should be well-evidenced by the current academic literature in that area, likely including aims and objectives, a literature review, methodology, and a reference list. You will also likely need to identify the gap in the literature, methodology, or practice that this project seeks to fill. Stick to the requirements set out by the description and any discussion you have with the supervisor.

If you are seeking to get funding for a project (rather than applying for an already-funded studentship), you will need to get a supervisor to support your application for funding and help you finesse your proposal.

Final reminders

As a Sabb you've gained so many different skills, had a variety of experiences (good and bad), and, whether you realise it or not, you've made a real difference to your university, your students' association, and your student community.

Remember that the world needs your unique light. Show it off at work, with your friends, to random people in cafes. But most of all, you deserve to see and appreciate your own light, even on difficult days.

“Always remember you matter, you're important and you are loved, and you bring to this world things no one else can.”

'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse' by Charlie Mackesy, 2019

Putting it into practice

Exercise A: sparqs Outduction Resource

Fill out these columns with your various experiences. You could do this by activity/project or by group. Think about the skills you've developed in each, and give specific examples to refer back to.

Activity/impact	Skill built/developed/practised	Specific example(s)
e.g. Freshers' Week	Navigating stakeholder relationships Advocating for inclusivity and accessibility	Liaising with DJs, student groups, Union management, University groups and Fife Council
e.g. Students' Association Board of Trustees	Trustee responsibilities Charity governance	Sabb remuneration advocacy Union Strategy work

Exercise B: Take a project you worked on and write about it as if it was in your CV.

- Quantify it – how many people did it reach/affect? What was the outcome?
- Remember to use action verbs – you don't need to write 'I motivated' go straight in with the verb. Using strong verbs like this also helps you come across as assertive and clear on your impact.
 - Some verbs to get you started:
 - Advanced, amplified, chaired, delivered, enhanced, established, maximised, pioneered, sharpened, transformed, unified.

Example:

Student Mental Health Agreement Survey Analysis

- Analysed results of student survey (400+ respondents) taking a qualitative approach
- Results informed the approach to a 2-year University-Students' Association partnership project (affecting 10,000+ students)

Advice and resources

- [The complete CV format guide](#) (Indeed)
- [How to write a CV: Tips, Template, and Example](#) (Indeed)
- [450 CV action verbs to make your job application stand out](#) (Indeed)
- [CV writing: your questions answered](#) (LinkedIn)
- [Sabb 'Out-duction'](#) from sparqs

Exercise C: Using the **STAR method**, draft a response to an interview/application question:

- 'Describe a time when you motivated a team.'
- 'Describe a time you overcame a challenge/conflict at work.'
- 'Describe a time when you had to make a decision quickly.'

- 'Describe a time when you failed and how you dealt with it.'
- 'Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a supervisor/manager.'
- 'Give an example of when you solved a problem.'
- 'What unique skills can you bring to this organisation?'

Advice and resources

- [The STAR method](#) (National Careers Centre)
- [How to use the STAR interview technique](#) (LinkedIn)
- [19 top interview questions in 2023 with sample answers](#) (Indeed)
- [38 challenging interview questions with sample answers](#) (Indeed)
- [How to write a cover letter with examples and tips](#) (Indeed)
- [Cover letter examples and samples](#) (Reed)
- [Personal statements](#) (Reed)

Exercise D: Write a brief journal entry piece in response to one (or more) of the following questions:

You can write a stream of consciousness, bullet points, draw, or mind map:

- What (in my personal life) am I excited to have more time for after being a Sabb?
- Am I okay to hand over my projects to someone else? What would help me to accept however they move forward?
- Am I anxious about any particular part of post-Sabb life? What worries me, and why?
- How has my view of who I am changed since I took on this role?
- I'm still passionate about _____. This is how I will channel that passion in my post-Sabb life:
- What, outside of my Sabb role, makes me feel valued and important?
- How do I want to remember this time in my life/career?
- How has my perspective on what I want from a career/my life changed since being a Sabb?

Example ways of journaling:

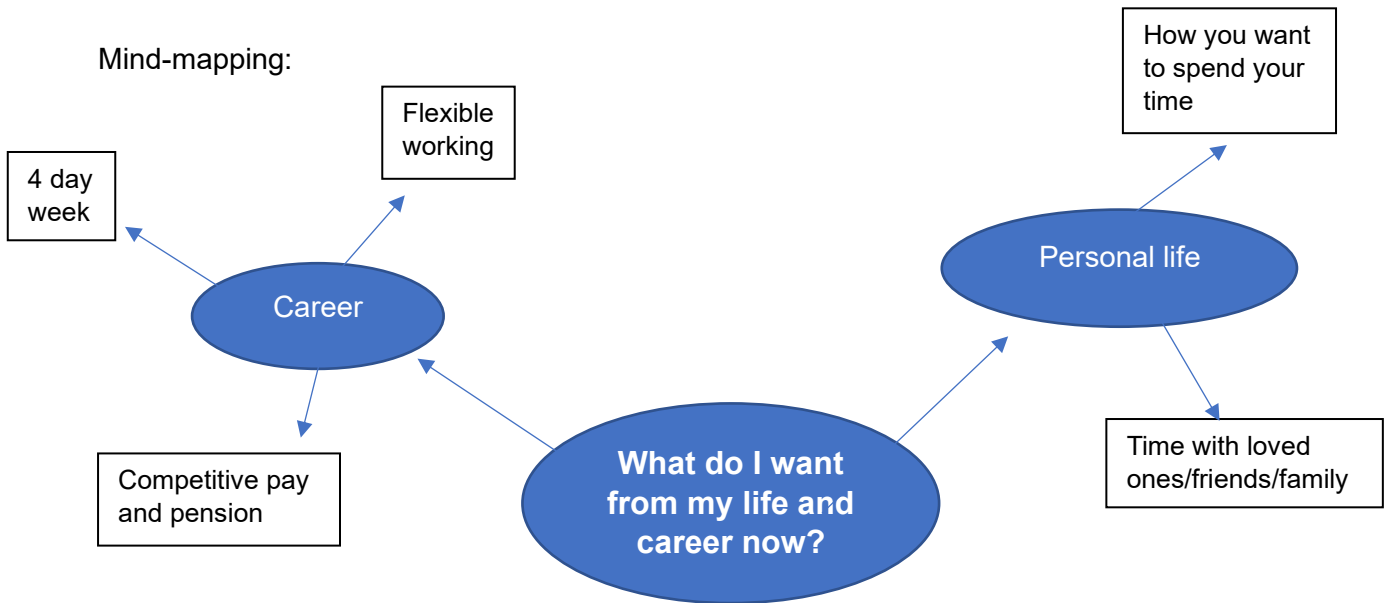
What do I want my life and career to look like now?

Stream of consciousness:

In some ways I'm scared about life and my career. When I focus on the good things though, I think about all the fun things I'll be able to do, like spending time with friends and trying things I've never done before. In terms of my career, I know I need flexibility in working patterns because having to come in to the office all the time was so draining and just made me feel rubbish.

Bullet points:

- Flexible working
- Times with friends
- Feeling fulfilled



Skills brainstorming

Brainstorm/mind map the skills you've gained during your time as a Sabb. You can also use this method to think about your skills from your education, volunteering, and other work experience. You could do this as a brain-dump, where you write down anything that comes to mind and make sense of it later, or you can do it in a more structured way such as:

