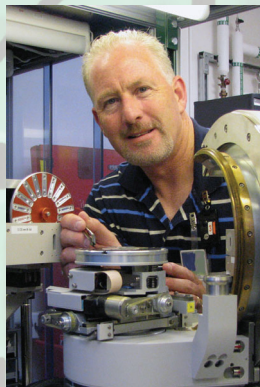




How to Search For and Find Your First Job

*Advice from
Recent Photonics Grads*



**Photonics Alumni
Council for Technicians**

OP-TEC
National Center for Optics and Photonics Education



Congratulations! You are about to complete your education and training in photonics (optics, fiber-optics, electro-optics, and lasers). We know this is a rigorous, demanding field of study, and you should feel proud of what you've accomplished. The rewards for your efforts will be coming shortly, as you begin a career in your first job.

Hopefully, you have already received information from your instructors about employers that are looking for photonics techs. You can be sure that plenty of opportunities are out there. And you have probably also received some good advice from your instructors and your program's employer council, along with friends, relatives, and others.

As recent grads working in this field, we want you to do well, and we want to share some tips we've learned when we were going through the search for our first jobs. Here are a few ideas:

1. **"Money isn't everything," but it helps.**

What are the priorities that you want to achieve in this job? If you have a spouse or "significant other," have a conversation about priorities. Here are some issues that you may want to consider when you apply and interview for the job.

- *Salary*
- *Employee insurance and other benefits:* These can be as important as salary. It may even be worth considering a lower salary if the benefits are better. Think long-term: Do you or your dependents have physical conditions that will require significant medical or dental services and/or prescriptions? Do you plan to have more children? Does the medical insurance include maternity coverage? What about life and disability insurance?
- *Working conditions:* How much travel does the job require? How long will the trips typically be, and where will you be required to go? Are the hours normal (8–5), or will you work shifts? Does the employer offer daycare for children?

- *Opportunity to learn more:* Does the employer provide courses at work? Vendor training on new equipment? Short courses? Tuition reimbursement? (Do you want to continue your education?)

2. Where do you want to live? *Where would you be willing to live?*

- Are there personal or family needs that require you to live near your home town? Do you prefer to live in a metropolitan area or a small community? Are you willing to commute to work? Do you have a strong desire to live in the mountains or near the coast, or in a particular section of the country?
- Do you or any of your family members have medical conditions (such as allergies) that would preclude living in certain parts of the country?

If location is not a strong preference for you or your family, don't make it a condition for selecting a potential employer. It's important not to limit your options unnecessarily.

3. What kind of work do you want to do?

- Do you want to work in a lab or do "field work"?
- Is there a particular specialization that you are interested in or good at?
- Do you want to work on a team or independently?

Make these factors a *focal point* of your search but not a *limiting factor*.

4. Have you prepared a resume?

- Look for a *model format* to organize your resume. If your college does not have this resource, check out <http://career-advice.monster.com/>, which provides sample resumes and advice on writing resumes and cover letters and interviewing.
- What things are important to include? Include your *technical strengths*. List the strongest points among your "soft skills."

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- What *type of references* will have the most impact? Don't include family members, friends, or your minister. Employers know they will speak highly of you, no matter what. A former employer, co-worker, or instructor will be a valued reference.
- Include a cover letter summarizing your strengths and directly correlating your skills and experience with the requirements of the position. Make sure you communicate how you can “add value” to the organization.
- Make sure your resume layout is clean and well organized. Proofread your resume and cover letter and make absolutely certain there are no spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors.

5. What do you hope will happen in the interview?

- Make a list of questions you would like to ask. Consider the information and issues in items 1–3 above. Find the website of the organization with which you will be interviewing. Learn as much as you can about the organization from its website. Ask the interviewer questions that occurred to you during your review of the website.
- Be prepared to answer questions about your career interests, personal life, and college/work experience.
- Be prompt and dress appropriately for the interview.
- After the interview, send a thank you card to the person who interviewed you expressing your interest in the job and appreciation for his or her time.

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