

**HOW TO FIND AN
ENTRY-LEVEL
BIOTECHNOLOGY
POSITION**

**INFORMATION THAT WILL QUICKLY
IMPROVE YOUR JOB SEARCH**

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About the Author

I am the founder and President of BioPharmGuy.com, a career and informational resource for the biotech industry.

When I graduated with my B.S.E. in chemical engineering, I had no job. I was poorly qualified for most jobs and poorly prepared for my job search. I probably made every mistake in the proverbial book as well as every mistake in this book. Ultimately, I ended up with a low-paying lab technician job at a hospital. This was somewhat of a coup as I was suddenly doing molecular biology lab work despite having taken zero biology-related courses since freshman year in high school.

I hated the job, I didn't care for my boss and I was paid poorly, but there was nothing I felt I could do about the situation. When I did try to move on to other jobs, I more or less only looked at Monster.com or Medzilla - a rookie mistake if ever there was one. It was 2003, so there were fewer online resources available, but I still look back in anger.

Eventually, I came to appreciate the biological sciences, if not molecular biology bench work. I enrolled in a Masters of Pharmaceutical Engineering program and earned my degree in three semesters while also getting an internship. I was able to get some interviews in my third semester, but no job panned out. After graduating, I began collecting links to company career pages with the aim of going directly to their websites to look for jobs.

This job search technique worked very well for me, so I planned on eventually creating a website based on the idea. After getting a full-time job in Boston, I found myself with lots of free time on nights and weekends as I knew few people in a new city. Eventually, I decided to quit wasting that free time and learned HTML and basic website design.

BioPharmGuy.com went live on March 2, 2008 and for the first couple years, I was employed full-time and ran it as a hobby. After moving due to my wife's job, I ended up in a biotech desert and the website became my full-time thing. It has gotten much better since then and is now database-driven utilizing PHP, MySQL, HTML, XML and Javascript. I guess you could say many thousands of people are happy I moved to Indiana, but they don't know it.

Through running BioPharmGuy for many years I have offered many different services. One was a job search service where people would pay me per job I found for them. Many of the candidates were seeking entry level employment. Another was an entry-level job aggregation service. For this, every week I would go to 300 company websites, aggregate all the entry-level jobs into a pdf file and charge people for the list.

Entry-level people have always been my favorite to help. With no idea whether I could get any value out of it, I started a free page where I post entry-level jobs. I personally spend the time to find all the jobs. I decided that my expertise might be of use to people interested in entry-level jobs, and thus this book was born.

I want to be clear that everything here is my opinion. I am not a job search professional, but I have found entry-level jobs for myself and I do run a job search website which 800 people a day seem to like. I offer no guarantees that any of my ideas will work for anyone, but I certainly believe there is something for everyone in this book.

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Introduction

The internet is a gigantic resource for job advice. Most of it is boring and borderline useless. How many times can you read the same resume advice packaged in a different blog post? The worst part is the great articles with the most interesting points are almost invisible because the blogs with the best search engine optimization strategies are the ones that end up on the first page of search results. Few people have the fortitude to wade through more than a couple pages of search results before clicking on an article or quitting.

In the job search space, Google does a poor job of classifying pages properly. If I google “entry-level biotech job advice” my first-page of results includes pages at Indeed, LinkedIn, Salary.com and CareerBuilder; none of those landing pages contain advice about getting an entry-level job.

I write occasional articles for BioPharmGuy.com and I make it a point to never write about something I've read about elsewhere. Repetitive information like that contributes to the noise problem we have nowadays...so much noise, so little useful information. I think my readers also prefer that I offer something interesting and of value. I'm not trying to maximize my social media traffic or something stupid like that. I just like helping people. So I write maybe 1-2 job search advice articles a year whenever I have a unique idea.

I have continued my commitment to only include useful information in this book. You can read about basic things like job interviewing and resume writing many places online, so there is no value in repeating it here. I will try to focus on things I have either never seen online or have seen in obscure places. I will also add many of my personal opinions on some things and usually will include my reasoning behind them. At least you know you're getting an opinion from someone who is plugged in to the online biotech job search scene.

What To Do

When you're trying to find your first job in a new industry, the first thing to figure out is simply what to do. Most people looking for entry-level jobs are college graduates who think they know what to do. Give them a few years and they'll realize they were dead wrong all along. Typically what I see is new grads not even thinking about what they *should* do, they're just interested in doing what they *want* to do. They'll do the easiest stuff and just hope to get lucky.

I wish every self-respecting university would require one course per year in Life Skills. You get out of life what you put in. Some people get lucky one way or the other, but not many. If you put garbage into your job search, you should expect to get garbage out.

I will start by explaining the main job searching strategies and recommend whether you should or should not do them and why. Please recognize that I have been out of college for over a decade and have gotten many jobs and job offers since then in various ways. I have lots of experience getting jobs and helping people get jobs.

With all job search resources, the most important thing to consider is the source's motives. I generally point to motives in my explanation as to why I think different websites are good or bad. Knowing the incentives that others are operating based on is the best way to determine if what they're doing is legit and high quality.

Networking

This is the most important way people get jobs. Accept that right now.

There is absolutely no shame in getting your foot in the door because of who you know. Our society, despite the lip-service paid to being a meritocracy, is still primarily about who you know.

Do you think Harvard really educates their students better than Georgia Tech? Get real. Students at all high-end universities learn the same stuff. Harvard students just get to say they learned that same stuff from much more famous people, and when they graduate, their alumni network puts every other school's to shame. They are paying a premium for the network and the institution name, not the education.

Thinking further back, most people get their "who you know" break long before it's time to find a job - they get it when they're born. Maybe their parents are truly visionary geniuses, but more likely their parents caught a lucky break once upon a time. That lucky break passes down through the generations via wealth and knowledge among other things. The more money you have, the more you can afford SAT prep classes and extraordinary tuition costs for your children.

When the lucky breaks come, you take them. But while you're waiting, you must be proactive and try to give those breaks the opportunity to happen. That's why you contact people you know and ask about job openings. Maybe they don't have anything for you, but they do know someone else and can refer you onwards. Networking is the **best** way to find a job. People are more comfortable recommending you for a job or hiring you if you have a social connection. There's something in human nature about trusting a friend or a friend of a friend more than total stranger.

Some people act morally opposed to getting a job because of who they know. I say life isn't black and white; we live in a world of nuance. Sure, it would be morally corrupt to get a job because of who you know if you were totally unqualified. But why is it so bad if you are totally or at least mostly qualified? You would be fine at the job, but would have come with someone's seal of approval. That seal of approval is *gold* in the hiring game. Strangers are unpredictable, so it's in almost everyone's interest to hire someone through a recommendation.

Work your network then try to expand your network. You don't have to cold call strangers or brown nose to be networking. Just talk to people you know and they'll even do some of the work for you. People like to help other people.

Career Centers

Career Centers are not all equal. Here I discuss the attributes of each type of career center. Hopefully after reading this, you will recognize the benefits each may give to you.

Your University's Career Center

Career centers are the go-to option for current students. These centers portray themselves as an almost magical place where jobs are free for the taking. They're not. They are certainly going to place some students, but a small proportion of graduates find jobs through their career centers. I didn't personally know a single one and I went to the University of Michigan, which is not exactly a tiny school.

One issue with career centers is they seem to work either with the largest companies who have a fleet of career fair representatives, or with local companies. If you think about it, how many career centers can have dedicated job openings that are just for their students? Not many. If you're talking about an Amgen-type company, every university in America wants to place students there. How many entry-level scientists and engineers do they hire in a year? From what I have seen, maybe 50, and that's pretty much the biggest biotech company in the world.

Even if your school has a relationship with a big company, that doesn't mean anyone will ever get hired through your career center. More likely is these companies will give your career center information about the jobs they already list on their own career pages.

This just makes your job search unnecessarily complicated. If the jobs are at company websites, just go to the company websites. (See Company Career Pages, p.13)

The campus interviews are great since you get real-world interview practice. I advise trying to do as many of them as possible. Practice, practice, practice.

Dirty Secrets

Did you know that career centers usually charge companies to come to career fairs? I have communicated with career centers in the past trying to get them to share my website with their students (they rarely do, more on this later) and they end up putting me on their employer email lists. This spring I received Career Fair invites offering to let me try to hire their students for only \$400 at a middling public school in Ohio and \$335 at a terrible public school in Michigan. Imagine what it might cost to have access to the better students at the best schools! This is INSANE. I do recognize that it can't be free since the fair can only be a certain size, I just don't know that highest bidder is the best way to allocate places at career fairs.

Also, did you know that some schools actually charge companies to post jobs on their in-house career systems? Charging companies to present job openings to students...it's stunning. Luckily, the number of schools that do this is small and getting smaller, but it's eye-opening that it still happens at all.

Many career centers seem to focus on cultivating corporate relationships, while placing candidates is their secondary goal. Why do I say this? For one, it's nearly impossible to find out what percentage of students were placed through the career centers. On the flip side, I sure do see lots and lots of bragging about the companies with which the career centers have existing relationships. Isn't this backwards? Shouldn't job placements be the ends and the companies be the means?

If career centers do publicize job placement numbers, they almost never explain how many found jobs *because* of the career center. They simply survey the graduates and find out who is working or in graduate school. This is worthless information by which to judge the career center. Maybe numbers are difficult to come by because it's just difficult to quantify who found their job because of the career center. I accept that. But at the same time, this is placing a lot of blind trust in a system that may or may not be working well.

The only University I could find that explicitly had a number for how many grads found jobs because of the career center advertised it this way:

“78% of all BS grads who reported jobs by graduation said they obtained those jobs through the...career center”

It sounds good until you start to wonder exactly what percentage of grads had a job by graduation. I decided to investigate further. I contacted them and eventually found out that 38% of graduates had a job by graduation, so by their account 30% of graduates were placed through the career center. Since they're the only career center I could find that published any information, I assume that's the upper-threshold of career center success at large Universities.

Ask yourself why more career centers aren't publicizing statistics on how many students they place. If they were doing a great job, wouldn't they want everyone to know?

They know only one way

My biggest pet peeve, being a job search website guy, is that 90% of university career centers do not even want to think about helping students find jobs online. Possibly it's because they don't get credit for helping that student. I have probably emailed 400 career centers asking that they share my site with students looking at biotechnology, pharmaceutical or medical device careers. Something like *seven* have posted a link to BioPharmGuy on their websites. I saw no traffic bumps from any others. A few probably slipped under my radar.

It drives me crazy because my site useful! When people find my site they are often floored that this resource exists. I have heard so many versions of "I wish I would have found this site three years ago" it makes me sick. There are a few career centers out there that are always looking out for their students best interests and working hard for them, just too few.

The Upside

Here's what career centers are pretty good at: resume critiquing, general interview advice and advising on courses that seem to be pertinent to different types of jobs. Really, if you're interested in a biotech career, you can find better biotech-specific resume writing tips online.

Overall I don't think you should consider the career center a great resource for finding a job; it's a good resource to learn about interviewing, resumes and things like that.

Your Major's Career Liaison/Advisor

Not every department has this, but when they do, these people are working hard to find their students jobs. They are awesome. If you are in a larger major, do yourself a favor and meet this person. They go by many different names but Coordinator, Advisor, Liaison and Assistant seem to pop up a lot in their job titles.

I can't speak highly enough about these people. They are a better resource to you than anything, primarily due to networking. Past graduates often contact them with unadvertised job openings at their companies. What's more, if you come across a resource that might help your fellow students, the coordinator will actually share it with everyone!

If I ever get a job at a university, I believe it will be in this type of job.

Other Schools' Career Centers

Using other schools' career resources is a good idea, especially if you don't reside in a biotech region. You probably can't access their job postings, but you do have access to their website information. Lots of it is industry-specific. Illinois (<http://www.biotech.uiuc.edu/>) comes to mind for having excellent biotech information.

Additionally, you may find it useful to check out the home page for your major at another school. Many departments keep their own biotech/science-specific career pages with useful links and job postings. Depending on the quality of their support staff, these links can be very good.

Non-Academic Career Centers

Non-academic career centers are usually publicly run and affiliated with unemployment agencies, although some states have completely privatized their career placement system. The quality of these institutions will vary considerably between states. For a biotech-focused job search only California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and North Carolina (maybe Maryland) will be worth your time. Most of these career centers are for unemployed people from all walks of life. If you take a cross-section of unemployed people, the states mentioned are the only places to have more than a handful of biotech workers.

I have personal experience with the Massachusetts career center system and it was highly useful. I would guess this is because these individual career centers have to show results because they get judged by how quickly unemployed people get off their books, so they are willing to do anything to help job-seekers. This includes gathering links to useful information and posting it on their websites. A big bonus of their independence is that all their websites are different so you get to pick and choose the best things from each.

On the other hand, I also have experience with Michigan's career placement system and it is obvious they cater to computer illiterate old-timers. As of 2009 it was TERRIBLE. They don't even have websites for individual career centers, so it's almost as if they require you to come in person to their office to look for jobs. What year is it??

Every state's career centers are going to be different. It's worth checking them out to see what they offer.

Job Boards

Let me be up front; I don't like job boards. I loathe job boards. I have written posts at BioPharmGuy about this and I will repeat some of it here.

Job boards are good at spitting out unfathomable amounts of information that most people can never efficiently pore over. Yes, you can handle the first couple pages of results, but after you view 50 job postings, the quality tails off. Usually you can't just search for "entry level" or tick a box that says entry level. Even if you can, they will show you hundreds of jobs that require three years experience. (Industry people often consider entry level to be less than five years of experience!)

Searching for entry-level jobs at job boards will find you 20-30 decent job openings, yet somehow when I do entry-level job searches by going directly to company career pages, I find more than 200 jobs most of the time. What's going on?

I have been looking for entry level jobs for many years (not for me, for others) and even with my expertise of job titles (see Appendix A, p. 33) I would never find 200 realistic entry-level jobs at Monster or something like that. Even Indeed, which is superior to Monster despite its apparently lower U.S. advertising budget, would overwhelm most first-time job-seekers.

The point is, there are hundreds of entry-level jobs out there and most are not at Monster, Indeed, etc.

You don't know what you want

On their landing pages some job boards offer the following text entry spaces:

Monster: job title; skills/keywords; geographical locations

Indeed: what; where

CareerBuilder: keywords; location (plus a dropdown box for careers by category)

I love simplicity - to a point. The problem is we have a severe catch-22 of job boards:

If you know what you're looking for, you don't need a job board. If you don't know what you're looking for, you can't get what you need from a job board.

The first half of that Catch-22 means that if you know what you're looking for, you can just plug that in to Google and find what you need.

Exceptions do exist, such as for a very small geographical area where you can browse every job in the area quickly. But in the CareerBuilder example they have a dropdown where you can just look for all biotech jobs. I did that and it showed 32 total jobs in San Diego. I can find 32 jobs in San Diego at *one company* by going to company career pages!

Medzilla is another job board, but is specific to biotechnology, pharmaceuticals & healthcare. This is much better than the more general job boards, but still suffers from the same problems. They offer the same what/where as Indeed. Again, if you don't know what you're looking for, it's pointless. If there were an easy way to search for jobs requiring 0-1 yrs of experience, then it would be so-so (though it would still only give you the results from companies that paid to have their jobs included on Medzilla)

So without understanding what jobs you're supposed to be looking for in the first place, you can't get the most out of a job board. Once you understand what you're looking for, you can find what you want in other places that are more inclusive (and don't show only listings from companies that paid up)

You will be lost in the resume pile

Popular job boards have another fatal flaw, which is that almost every job posted on their sites receive an immense number of applicants. I don't care how good of a candidate you are, you're better off applying to jobs fewer people can find.

Job Aggregators

Other job-board-like websites simply aggregate the jobs at many websites and present them through their own site. These are good in theory but their limitation is they can only usually grab the job listings if the company in question uses well-known recruiting software like Taleo, ICIMS, BrassRing, Jobvite, etc. Once you start working your way down to smaller companies or companies that use in-house recruiting software, their

jobs aren't showing up in the aggregators. I've tested this for many smaller companies. The aggregators just have no way of knowing the format of simple job postings on many company websites.

They will all claim at some point to have figured out a new and improved way to do this, and they will almost certainly use the term 'algorithm' in their explanation, but they are lying. Only a human can do it. Which leads to the next section.

Company Career Pages

Going directly to company career pages is the best way to do an online job search. BioPharmGuy is built on this search methodology. It's actually the only reason the website even exists. The downside? It takes time and effort. You can't just enter a search term and magically be presented with every job in the United States. You have to actually do some work. Luckily, I have some tips and tricks later about how to do this with maximum efficiency.

I accept that it's daunting to have to go to hundreds of websites instead of three. When I first started doing job searches this way, even I thought I was crazy. I spent four straight nights leading up to Christmas just finding companies and bookmarking their websites. I had to make bookmark files since I was doing it on many different computers and needed them to be portable.

Luckily for you, that's done and I have most of the information you need at BioPharmGuy.

Emailing Human Resources (HR) directly

Emailing the HR department directly, otherwise known as a spontaneous job application, can work. It might be especially useful when companies don't have a career page. It's possible they post their jobs on job boards only, or that they go through retained search firms who have first dibs on trying to find a candidate before the process is opened up to general applicants. It's also possible that they weren't planning to hire anyone, but they'll see your resume and like you, then start to think about if they could use you somewhere. You'd be surprised.

I definitely wouldn't recommend getting a hundred email addresses and bcc-ing everyone. It's probably illegal and will likely be deleted immediately. What can work is if you tailor each email to the specific company or HR person. Put some effort into it and see what happens. This should only be a small part of a job search, but I have personally seen it work so I can confirm it is at least not worthless.

Social Networks

LinkedIn

This is a great resource for mid and late career people. I'm not so convinced of its power for entry level people. Mainly I say this because you have a very small professional network when you're just starting out. That's not to say you have no network at all, but realistically the people on your LinkedIn network are also on your Facebook friends list, right? Or at the very least, you know them well or worked with them personally so in that regard it's similar to traditional networking.

I don't think LinkedIn adds much unless you're thinking of paying a premium to be able to spontaneously email strangers. That might work. I have no experience with that, so I don't know.

Facebook

Facebook is more likely to cost you a job than win you a job. I would recommend sanitizing your account big time while job searching. Even if you have restricted settings, you never know if a friend of a friend knows someone at the company where you applied. Facebook is just regular networking, but with the extreme downside of letting people see that picture of you drunk and kissing a donkey.

Make sure your account privacy settings are as restricted as is reasonable. Businesses are often searching the internet for information on job applicants. Keep that in mind. Even things you 'like' can cost you. Un-'like' anything political or religious or anything that could otherwise piss someone off.

Reddit

If you're not familiar with Reddit, it's a social bookmarking site where users submit links and other users vote them up or down, thus moving them up or down the current rankings. It's a link popularity contest and a HUGE timewaster.

The upside is they have things they call subreddits for specific topics or interests. These subreddits include biology, biotech and jobs. Sometimes users will post new jobs there on behalf of their companies so you can be among the first to apply. The industry-specific forums are filled with many entry level people who are trading tips on job searches. Lots of it is garbage, so you have to decide for yourself who in those forums is an idiot and who has something useful to offer. Then again, that's true of the entire internet, so as long as your internal bulls**t detector is working, Reddit is a good site to grab a few ideas and maybe find out about some jobs while you're there.

Recruiters

Recruiters don't exactly love entry level people. Most are paid relative to your first-year salary, so being the lowest salaries of all, entry level isn't a cash cow for them. They will still try to place you, but don't hold your breath.

I would recommend contacting several of them to get them all working for you. Like anything in job searching it's a numbers game...the more you try, the better the chance of getting that job. They all probably work with different companies and find out about some jobs at each that aren't officially posted by companies yet. That's probably the best thing about recruiters - they have the inside track on some jobs.

Other Useful Sites

Biospace

This is a generalized news and information site for biotechnology, medical devices, etc. They also offer job postings for companies, but charge \$100-\$375 per 30-day posting (depending on quantity). Wrap your head around that.....\$375 PER POSTING! It's obvious most companies don't have that kind of HR budget, so their jobs are miles away from Biospace.

Craigslist

In the biotech hotbeds there are a reasonable amount of jobs posted on Craigslist. Yet even Craig charges \$75 to post a job in San Francisco and \$25 in other major cities. It's definitely worth checking out, but as always with Craigslist, don't give out any personal information and be wary of scams.

Sites I Don't Recommend

BiotechCrossing

This site is interesting to me on its face. They do not let companies post jobs. Instead, they use software and cheap offshore labor to create a database of available jobs. They refer to this as “research”. They offer a three day free trial as long as you're willing to give them your credit card information and permit them to auto renew. Any company that operates that way makes me think they profit not off their service quality, but off people’s laziness. Once I saw they wanted my credit card information, I stopped registering. Then they emailed me to ask if I had a problem. Then they emailed four more times trying to lure me back.

They charge \$50/month to use the site,. From their explanation of why they are not free

“...our users on an average tend to be people with high incomes, good educations, and the upwardly mobile. We believe our research is valuable to everyone; however, users of our service are overwhelmingly the highest paid people in society with good educations.”

Riiiiight. This is just a way of saying that if you’re willing to pay, that shows you’re better than all those other peons out there. Just marketing garbage; don’t believe it. The highest paid people in society are being poached by headhunters, not using websites that charge them a fee.

As an aside, think about how many people at that company understand biotech considering they run 160 different job search websites which are listed here:

<http://www.employmentcrossing.com/lcterms.php>

iHireBiotechnology

Same as BiotechCrossing - except the price is \$35/month to access their database. This site is very coy about pricing. They want you to register before telling you how much it's going to cost you. The twist here vs. BiotechCrossing is they also charge companies to post jobs, whereas BiotechCrossing aggregates them. It seems bonkers to charge both ways.

My biggest knock is that, like BiotechCrossing, it's not really a biotech-specific site. This site is one of about 60 run by iHire LLC. Which is fine, but you should keep that in mind when trying to decide if they understand biotech well enough for your needs.

hireBio

I did a search and found no results for Research Associate, which is one of the most common job titles in biotech. Then I searched for just 'research' and found two jobs in the entire United States. Safe to say this site stinks. What's funny is they have a “Job Seeker Alert” on the left sidebar which tells you:

“Our site usage trend analysis indicates that currently, most employers are filling open jobs through resume searching only. These jobs are never posted. To ensure you are considered for these unposted positions, please take a moment to post your resume”

Sounds like a bad excuse for why there are no job postings on their site. They more than likely sell resume database subscriptions.

BioTechJobcafe

I did a search for “associate” and found zero jobs. I then did a search for any biotech job and found nothing. This site seems dead. Don't waste your time.

General Job Search Tips

My specialty is finding jobs at company career pages so I will start by explaining how I think you can improve your efficiency at this process. Screen grabs will be from Firefox 18, but any Firefox version after 10 or so should work. Possibly some earlier ones as well. Working on a fast computer make a big difference.

The first five tips will deal with efficiently checking company career pages for jobs, and after that are more generalized tips.

Company Career Page Tip #1: Tabbed Browsing

Windows opening left and right will add 30% more time to your tasks, so tabbed browsing is a must. I recommend Firefox over all browsers, the main reason being, with a relatively powerful computer, you can open 100-200 web pages simultaneously.

Company Career Page Tip #2: Center Clicking

Center clicking (assuming you have a modern mouse with a clickable scroll wheel) opens a link in a new tab. If you're doing your search directly at a site like BioPharmGuy with a list of links, it is very convenient to scroll down the page and just center click over and over. By center clicking, you should remain on the current tab instead of being taken to the newly opened tab. This way you can click them all, then later go through the open tabs one by one. While browsing the actual company career pages, you can do the same center-click trick for almost all sites. There are some big ones that use Taleo's recruiting software where you can't center-click and they are *annoying*.

Company Career Page Tip #3: Keyboard Shortcuts

After having looked for entry-level biotech jobs for over four years using the company website methodology, the following Firefox keyboard shortcuts have proven to be the most useful in speeding up and improving my work

Close Tab: Ctrl+W

Move to next tab: Ctrl+Tab

Move to previous tab: Ctrl+Shift+Tab

Open most recently closed tab: Ctrl+Shift+T (good for accidental closings)

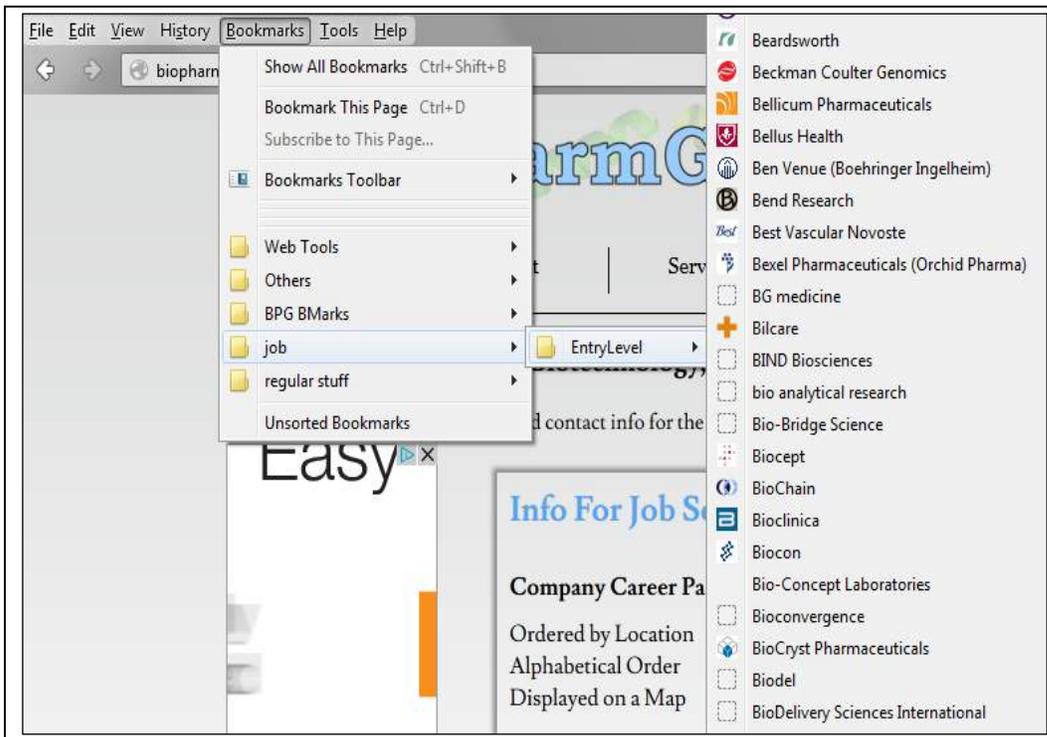
My strategy is to open a bunch of links, then have one hand on Ctrl-W the other on the mouse. I scroll down, center-click the jobs I like, then Ctrl-W. Repeat. Once you get to a larger company web page, it will take a while to check for jobs. The shortcuts are mostly useful when wading through lots of small companies with brief career pages.

The more you use the shortcuts, the more comfortable you get with them and the more useful they become.

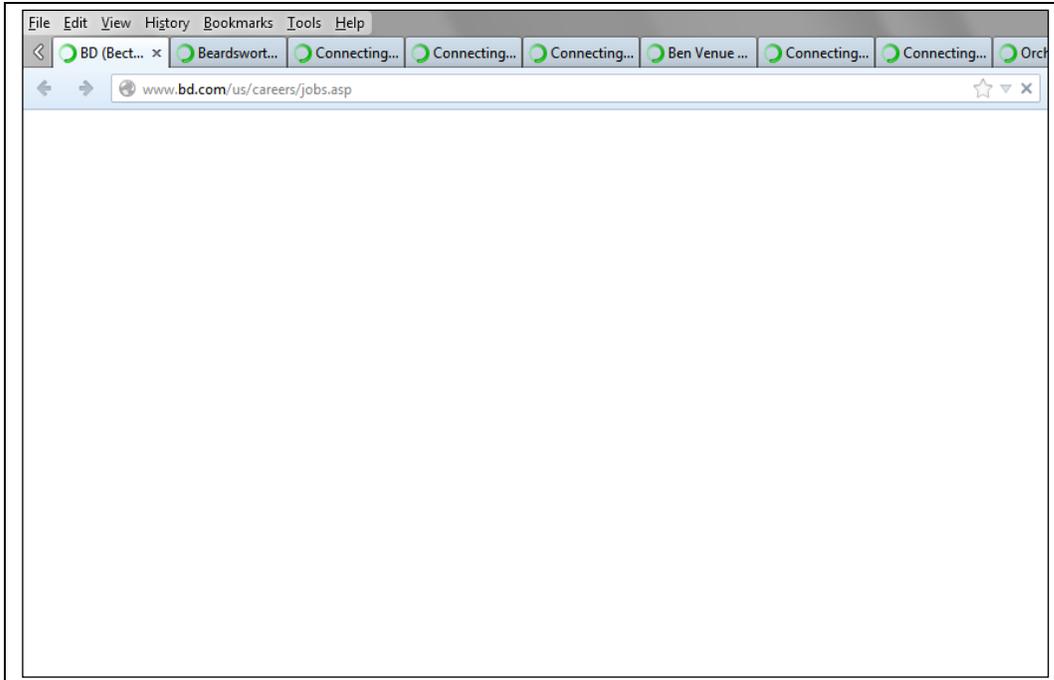
Company Career Page Tip #4: Bookmark Folders

Firefox has a neat feature when it comes to bookmarks where it lets you open an entire folder full of bookmarks at the same time in separate tabs. Maybe you use BioPharmGuy to open links to all the company pages of interest. You can then bookmark them all, move those bookmarks to a single folder within your bookmark menu and next time, it will be one click to open all of them at once. (Warning: if you have an old computer, you might want to split them into folders with only 50 bookmarks in each. Then again, if you have a brand new computer you can get away with up to 250. This depends on your internet connection too).

Below is an example of a folder full of company links. Once hovering over the name of this folder (named EntryLevel), you may center click, which will automatically open all bookmarks in new tabs. Alternatively, you can right-click and select the “Open All in Tabs” option.



After you click, your screen will turn to this:



Don't worry...it's supposed to look empty. You may have to wait up to 15 minutes for everything to load (depending on your computer speed, your internet connection speed and how many bookmarks you attempted to open.) Go grab a snack. If you have a very fast/new machine, the pages will begin loading almost immediately.

Company Career Page Tip #5: BioPharmGuy Custom Page

If you don't want to spend a lot of time gathering your own set of bookmarks and would just like a simple page with clickable links we do offer Custom Pages at BioPharmGuy. These look like any of our pages, but include only the companies you're interested in. These can be determined by state and country as well as business type. You can include as many states and business types as you want. As of this writing the Custom Page is \$29 for six months. (<http://biopharmguy.com/services/custompage.php>)

Entry-level job titles

The most common entry-level job titles include the words Assistant, Associate, Analyst or Technician. They often include a "I" or "1" after the job title. In Appendix A you will find a list of 100 entry-level job titles that I have found in the past year. While this is in no way intended to be exhaustive, hopefully you will be tuned in to more jobs you didn't realize could be entry level.

A word of warning: job titles are different at different companies. You might find a Scientist I job that's entry level at a small company, but at a big company it would be rare (though Life Technologies comes to mind). Same goes for Research Associate. If you check large companies you will see Research Associate I and sometimes II are entry

level, but nothing higher. Small companies will often make Research Associate III an entry-level job.

To reiterate, the entry-level job title list is included as Appendix A.

How often to check company websites

This depends heavily on the number of companies you are checking. If it's small, say under 200, I would do it every week. If it's huge, say 700+ I would do it every month, (25% of them each week). It's always best to be an early applicant. Lots of companies don't need the perfect candidate, they just need a capable one.

When to job hunt

Short answer: Now! It never hurts.

Long answer: January-April is prime time for entry-level work. There are no vacation-worthy holidays and companies know a new crop of students will be graduating soon. December and probably the end of November are very bad. Summer is slow, but not slow enough to be a terrible time to find a job.

Pretty much, whenever workers are taking vacation is a relatively bad time to search for and apply to jobs. HR workers are people too. They don't do anything the weeks before and after a vacation just like the rest of us.

Job Application Tips

When applying for jobs through websites, there are a few things I recommend that all job seekers try to do.

Keywords

Include keywords in your resume that seem *exceptionally* important in the job description. For each job, this should be one or two...maybe three at most. My old example is a time I saw a job posting go on and on about cGMPs. I decided to change one of my course entries from "Regulatory Affairs" to "Regulatory Affairs (cGMPs, FDA, EMEA, etc)". That way some honest keywords were in my resume that might have helped me get an interview.

Loading up on keywords does not mean to force 15 of them into your personal statement or whatever. As with everything, don't do anything that will make you look like an idiot.

Always include a cover letter

Cover letters are free-form ways for to explain why you might be a very good or at least more interesting and unique candidate. Make sure you compose a new cover letter for each job. I don't mean totally write a new one...most of it will work for many job applications. What I mean is make one, change it for the next job, and the next job and a

couple more. The next thing you know, you just start piecing together bits from previous letters to create Frankenletters.

Apply if overqualified

I encourage entry level people to apply to lower level jobs, provided a company doesn't have proper entry-level jobs. If they want to interview you, then you get interview practice. If they want to hire you, you get a paycheck while you continue your job search. You get to network.

Most importantly, you will have the inside track for any new entry-level jobs that may be more suited to your skills and education. Just don't tell them you're planning on being a Manufacturing Technician for five years...that's ridiculous. Be more diplomatic about how it can help you in your career and how you are willing to put in some time learning the basics of the business.

Apply if under-qualified?

This one gives me fits. I always did it. And actually I did once get a fly-out when i felt under-qualified. If a company is asking for 0-2 yrs experience, they probably prefer 2 yrs since there's less training involved. If they ask for 2-4 yrs, they don't want to do very much training at all, if any.

You're *probably* wasting your time applying for jobs beyond your expertise unless you know you're a superstar candidate. Few people are, so take from that what you will.

Improve Your Knowledge of the Industry

You should educate yourself on some interesting companies in the biotech field. It could be nice to interject this information during an interview. Everyone knows the Amgen, Genentech, Pfizer big boys. Fewer people know there's a company started in a garage in Seattle that refers to themselves as "the crazy ones" (North Coast Bio).

Furthermore, knowledge on the small fry in the industry is beneficial since that's where the interesting and exciting things are actually happening. I'm not talking about IPOs and stock options, I'm talking about actual groundbreaking work.

(Begin diversion into why I think you should try to work at a small company)

We're rapidly approaching the biotech industry's inflection point where the big companies are losing the huge advantage they've had due to a confluence of three things:

Dispersion of talent

Large drug companies keep buying small ones and shutting them down. As a result there are thousands of brilliant scientists looking for something new to do. The more

entrepreneurial ones are embarking on wild new gambles. Most will fail, but many will succeed. It's getting interesting out there.

Democratization of Knowledge

More and more scientific information is freely available online. It's getting easier to search for what you need. Once the smaller questions are easy to answer quickly, great minds can focus on the big questions that will make a difference.

Plummeting Costs

Think about the computer industry. Once upon a time it was HP, IBM, Microsoft and some other titans. If you wanted to do anything important in the technology industry you could spend decades and enormous amounts of cash. Then in 2004, Facebook was created in a dorm room. That only happened because computing technology had become cheap enough and useful software tools were in place for normal people.

We're not at the point of dorm room biotechnology and frankly, we probably never will be due to space issues when dealing with living organisms. But the industry is at least moving in that direction. Already with the high turnover in biotech, there are asset sales every week. Basic lab equipment can last a long, long time. The more people who can afford to start a lab, the better for the industry as a whole. When big companies buy out and shut down small companies, there is instantly a vacant, biotech-ready building just wishing someone would buy or rent it. This is a great environment for start-ups with new ideas.

Small is Good

I happen to think the long tail of smaller biotech companies is better. Not only is the work more exciting and interesting, but the work environment is much less bogged down by procedures, paperwork, entrenched departmental interests and office politics. Sure, you get some of that stuff, but not nearly as much.

Also, you learn more facets of the biotech business when you're at smaller companies. You end up meeting most of the people who work at your company. If you work at a big company and meet 50 people, chances are 35 are in your area. If you meet 50 at a small company, you met everyone from CEO to QC to manufacturing to development to research to medical affairs to finance. It's a lot easier to understand how everything works when you have faces and names. This structural knowledge is especially useful if you have future management aspirations

Last but not least, small companies have a much better brag factor. You do cooler stuff, you work in a start-up environment. Yes, you usually do get paid less. Some people think job security is lower at small companies. If you're worried about job security, you're in the wrong industry. This is not 1959 General Motors. You should expect to work for no less than seven companies in your career and even that would be amazing. If you can find one job, you'll find another, right?

(now let's get back on track with the job search tips)

Improve Your Odds

Hunting for jobs is a numbers game, no matter the industry. Many people want to believe otherwise, but most successes in life have an enormous luck factor. You cannot control luck, but you can control your exposure to luck. By this I mean, the more you try, and the more effectively you try, the more likely you will strike gold.

This starts before job applications. By improving your resume throughout your academic career, you are increasing your exposure to a lucky break when it comes time to apply to a job. But let's say your resume is set and improving it is off the table for now. What do you do to improve your odds?

1) Think of new ways to find jobs

This book is full of useful information (I hope). But once this gets published, now this information is slightly less useful to you since more people know about it. To truly get a big advantage on others, you have to come up with ideas for yourself. That's what I did many years ago. Being a nice person I wanted to share it with everyone, and so BioPharmGuy was born. Of course, I didn't share it with anyone while I was looking for a job. That was *my* advantage. Now my ideas are here for you to use.

No one can tell you how to come up with unique and better ways to search for jobs, but when you do, you will be better off. All that critical thinking you experience in school should come in handy right about now. Apply it!

2) Practice makes perfect

The more you apply to jobs and refine your resume, the better it gets. If you see a borderline job, apply for it. Worst case you get an interview and decline the job. Real interview practice is golden. You can't mimic interviews. Mock interviews are like tickling yourself. It just doesn't work. Take any interview at any company when they visit campus. It's interview practice. Rationalize it by telling yourself you would consider the job if they paid really well.

3) Do whatever other people aren't doing

This is the centerpiece of why going to company career pages is a great strategy. It's more difficult to go to 100 websites than just going to Monster.com, so fewer people are going to do it. As a result, you are going to have a better chance at getting *every* job that is not on a big job board.

The same goes for anything and everything that some people find annoying, difficult, time-consuming, boring, etc. Whatever you don't want to do is what you **must** do to get an advantage.

Resume

I have some opinions to share on resumes, but I would suggest that you cruise around the internet as there are plenty of people willing to offer opinions on every aspect of resume writing. Here I will only address ways in which my opinion tends to diverge from the conventional wisdom and will give my explanations as to why.

What You Should Exclude That Lots of People Include

1) Irrelevant Jobs

Don't include any job that will have absolutely no effect on you being hired. Think Taco Bell, babysitting or shelving books at the grad library...that sort of thing. You're in your twenties (or older) now. No one cares about menial jobs. If you think it's important to show you have had jobs before, then include them, but don't add any description unless you were some sort of manager. It just looks like you're reaching when you try to write five bullet points about your duties at McDonald's. You made food, you cleaned stuff and you took orders. Everyone gets it.

2) Confusion & Buzzwords

The more buzzwords you include, the less you sound like a good candidate. If your skills and experience are not good enough, buzzwords aren't going to make you sound any better. Personally, I think it makes the applicant look silly, desperate and naive. Here's a real excerpt from a resume I reviewed:

“Results-driven, goal-oriented Biochemical Engineer with broad-based experience and hands-on skill in contemporary R&D operations, advanced analytical and experimental procedures, and the effective support of successful chemical and biochemical engineering efforts...Exceptional ability to concurrently manage complex, multi-step research and development oriented projects while meeting rigorous procedural standards, tight time-frames, and strict operational protocols...”

There is nothing useful in that paragraphical sentence. Everything alluded to here should just be mentioned in the professional experience section of the resume. This is a massively confusing paragraph. Make it readable or no one will read it.

What You Should Include That Lots of People Exclude

I've seen a lot of entry-level resumes. There are several things that should be on every graduate's resume that most fail to include.

1) Project Work

This is extremely important. It introduces the potential employer to concepts you've worked with in-depth and it provides more things to talk about during the interview about which you can actually converse. If you've never had any internships, this is even more important.

I think it works to put it in your education section after course work and before extracurricular activities.

2) Course Work

Amazingly, there are a **lot** of people who don't think coursework is important on a resume. I disagree. Granted, there's a right way and a wrong way to do it.

Wrong Way - Include a list of most of the classes you took

Right Way - List the classes that make you stand out from a standard graduate with your degree.

I had a potential employer tell me that they knew that I took fluid mechanics and thermodynamics, etc. since I had chemical engineering degree. That type of information was worthless to them. What was not worthless was knowing that I had taken some materials science courses. I wouldn't say you should omit *all* the common courses for your major, but the more interesting ones should take precedence and you should limit the number of courses you list to something like 8-10.

3) Equipment or techniques with which you have experience

If you have some experience in a lab, it might sound nice to say you "carried out experiments on different specimens" but it doesn't tell the employer anything. You need to explain what equipment or techniques you used. This serves the dual purpose of also adding keywords to your resume that recruiting software might look for. If the job posting asks for candidates with PCR experience, they might delete all submissions that don't mention PCR.

Resume Building (if you still can)

If you're still in school, but interested in figuring out how to find your first job, then here are some tips that may help you depending on how much time you have left.

1) Pick good projects

Project work gives you some extensive experience with individual topics. By wisely choosing your project topics, you can directly improve your resume and indirectly improve your ability to interview well (since there is now more to talk about that you understand). Too many students just pick the easiest project. Bad move.

2) Pick impressive class names

Outside of standard coursework, no one knows what the hell goes on in college classes. I took a class called History of the Oceans and it ended up being a class about global climate. Another time I took American Values which ended up having nothing whatsoever to do with the values of Americans.

Since no one will know what the course was about, it's nice to have an impressive sounding course name on your resume. If they find out it was rather lame once they ask about it in an interview, it won't matter since you already got the interview.

In graduate school I took a course called Cellular Biotechnology. It was a four-part course taught by four professors where we learned about four different areas of practical biotechnology applications. It was an interesting class in which I learned a lot, but most importantly, Cellular Biotechnology sounded pretty sweet on my resume. Everyone asked about it.

3) Join a pertinent organization

If the organization is well-established, it can always be helpful to have that potential connection with your interviewer. I was member of the International Society for Pharmaceutical Engineering (ISPE) and I ended up interviewing with one of the founders. I didn't have much to say about what I did in ISPE since we didn't do much. Most of those student groups exist just to be written on resumes anyways. Join the party!

Get It Looked At

As I mentioned, there are many places online to find out how to write resumes for various entry-level jobs. You can also ask people you know for samples of theirs. The **most important thing** for you to do is to have several people look at your resume and listen to their major suggestions. These can include people you know, but should include at least one person who you are expecting to tear you apart. That is the best way to make progress towards a polished and useful resume.

I learned this one the hard way when an interviewer told me point-blank my resume was garbage. He said it didn't explain to him what I brought to the table. Subsequently, I had a much better resume, but who knows what opportunities I missed out on beforehand? Do yourself a favor and work out the biggest resume kinks up front. It will improve your odds.

Interviews

Interview Attire

Before going further, let's get this out of the way. Don't show up to the interview dressed like a fool. No one wants to work with a jackass, so wear something nice.

You should always dress better than the interviewer up to the suit and tie level. (And certainly don't wear a tuxedo or ball gown.) If you think they'll be wearing khakis and a golf shirt, wear a suit. If you think they'll be wearing a short-sleeved shirt and shorts, wear a suit. And wear a belt and some clean shoes too. Maybe get a haircut. This isn't college. You're going to have a mountain to climb if you show up looking like a hippie. Maybe in Silicon Valley some of that stuff is ok, but biotech is not like that.

I know nothing about women's fashion, but here's what a BioPharmGuy visitor advised:

"I would go for a suit (pantsuit or skirtsuit) for ladies as well. Alternatively, nice slacks or a pencil skirt with a blouse or sweater. Keep jewelry, hair and makeup simple and minimal, perhaps avoiding the trendy pieces for now. The goal is to look serious and professional, not like you're in the process of pledging Tri-Delta."

I hate hearing candidates trying to figure out a way to dress casual for an interview. There is no excuse for looking like a fool. It's one of the few things that's totally within your control. Most thrift stores sell full men's suits for around \$10-\$20, belts for a few dollars, shoes for \$10 and dress shirts for \$5. If you can't pay \$40 for an entire interview outfit, no one can help you.

Interview Types

I'm not going to get into the basics of interviewing and things to say or not to say. I'm going to mostly point out things I have concluded through the years that you typically won't read about in other places. Briefly, there are two types of interviewers. The HR person who doesn't have any idea what your real job will be like, and the technical person who is the person you will either work for or with.

HR Interviews

HR interviews are just a dog and pony show to try to convince you that the HR person knows what they're doing. They really just know how to read a book of interview questions and give you some forms to fill out. They are going to ask you pretty much 100% irrelevant questions and you have to give them the answers *they want to hear*. These are people who usually don't understand the nature of the job for which you are being considered. They are obstacles.

Obstacles are to be avoided. Just tell the HR person exactly what you think would be the best sounding answer to a question. Make up whatever you want as long as it's not testable. (Never make up technical skills or experience) The questions are entirely hypothetical, so why can't the answers be as well? This is a test of whether you're naive enough to be honest about the time you punched your co-worker and ratted out your boss to the CEO. When an HR person asks these silly questions (a la "Tell me about a time you faced a conflict in a work setting..."), they're not trying to figure out why they should hire you...they're trying to figure out a reason *not* to hire you. Don't give them one.

Technical Interviews

This is the polar opposite of the HR interview. Don't make **anything** up in these ones. Be real. If you aren't, they're going to detect your bulls**t from a mile away. The interviewer is highly knowledgeable in the field and you are not. Don't pretend you know what they're talking about the whole time. Ask them to clarify and if you have no clue what they're talking about, tell them so.

Having someone who is honest about their deficiencies can be important, especially in a regulated industry. Documentation and protocols must be done properly and if a person is willing to accept their fallibility in an interview it portends a better ability for them to seek help when they really don't know the right answer.

Most interviewing success is mental. If you convince yourself you are the right person for the job it will be much, much easier to convince the interviewer as well. If you go in knowing you are not right for the job, you're toast. Get in the right state of mind before the interview and *don't leave it*.

Technical interviews are usually with a person you will work with or for in the future. Your personality matters as much as your credentials. Everyone with the same degree

will know pretty much the same things - you forget most things and relearn them on the job anyways. What differentiates is experiences and personality. The interviewer knows they are going to have to work with you for a long time and no one wants to hire someone who is very unlike themselves unless that person's expertise is off the charts. You're entry level so your expertise is very basic right now. Let your personality show and see what it can do for you.

When preparing for a technical interview, use your resume as your study guide and make sure you know everything inside and out. Refresh your memory on projects and courses you've done as well as internship assignments you completed. If you mention on your resume that you have worked on affinity HPLC or some particular assay/machine, you simply must know the theory behind it. You can't just sit there and say you loaded samples and ran a program. Being able to explain why the technique works, not just how it's done is immensely important in promoting yourself as an intelligent person.

Interview Questions

You've heard that you need to ask questions during an interview, right? So here's what you should do: go online and find those common lists of questions for you to ask the interviewer. Then punch yourself in the face because those lists are absolute garbage.

They're generic and those kinds of questions are worthless and will make you look silly in an interview with an actual scientist or engineer. They might work better for an HR interview, but I doubt it. You need to be a little original for them to believe this question is legitimate instead of forced (even though it is indeed forced).

Coming up with original and well thought-out questions is a difficult thing to do. If you don't know much about the job, how can you even know what to ask, right? I was never great at this, but over time I got better and better. I started with the stupid questions, like "why is this job open". The answer, of course, is "Who cares?" You applied for it and everyone knows you're taking it if it's offered. You're entry level - you have almost no choice.

So don't pretend like you have a choice, pretend that this company is the most interesting company in the world and you want to know more about the job even if you have no chance at getting it. Ask questions as if this was your dream job and you genuinely wanted to understand it more. Ask questions that try to help you determine if you're qualified for the job. Ask specific questions that help you to learn about what someone with this job does all day.

Don't ask questions that could be asked about almost every job for which you might interview. Those are the bad questions.

Conclusion: Reality Sucks

Finding a job is hard work. It involves a lot of time that is seemingly wasted. That time is *not* wasted. If your goal was to win the lottery and you did not win the lottery, would you really determine that you would have been just as well to not play the lottery? Of course not. You had to play to have a chance.

The same goes for your job search. If you apply to 100 jobs and don't get an interview, that doesn't mean you wasted your time. You can't win the lottery without playing and you can't get a job without trying.

Your first job is not going to be glorious. That's pretty much certain. Most people are too concerned with just getting a job to care how good it is, and rightly so in most cases. You need to get a start somewhere. Getting there can be pretty annoying. Some of those annoying things that you just have to suck up and do have been mentioned already, but we have time for a summary, eh?

1) Networking

No one likes networking unless they're one of those naturally gregarious people that are so friendly they annoy you.

Trying to expand your network isn't as bad as you think. It doesn't mean fawning, it means talking to people with experience in the industry and learning about what they do. If they have nothing to tell you, move on. If they have insights and interesting things to say, maybe you get their card and email them inquiring about job openings. Treat it as a way to find out about the industry, not as a way to get a contact. It makes it much more palatable.

2) Tailoring cover letters and resumes

People seem to *hate* doing this and I really don't get it. It's not like you have to write the thing longhand. We have software that makes this incredibly easy. As I said before, if you do it maybe 4-5 times, then the rest of the letters are just Frankenletters of previous letter sections.

The same goes for resumes. What works for many people is to job search for a while, then once they realize the types of jobs they like to apply for, make a resume for each job type. So you might end up with an "Engineering resume", "Laboratory Work Resume", "Quality Control Resume" and "Teaching Resume". Then it's just as simple as submitting the right one.

3) Ask *good* questions during interviews, and tell HR what they want to hear

In technical interviews, do your homework and come up with some really smart questions to ask about the job. In an HR interview tell them what they want to hear.

4) Expect to be underpaid

You're not going to get paid well. Expect it. That way if you get paid decently, you'll be excited. Early in a career it's important to get experience. Companies know entry-level workers are a dime a dozen and they can pay whatever they want. Some pay better than others, but you're not going to get rich. Whatever you were hoping to get, you will probably get no more than 75% of that. Expect it.

Now get to work!

In closing, I would like to say that you should expect it to take a long time to find a good job. If you need to, get a part-time job as soon as possible to make sure you aren't stressing out about finding something within a few weeks. Measuring a job search in weeks is not realistic. 4-6 months is normal; 8-12+ months is more common than you might think. (For more information on average job search lengths for the classes of 2006-2012 check out "Chasing the American Dream: Recent College Graduates and the Great Recession" which is available here:

http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/content/Chasing_American_Dream_Report.pdf)

It can be defeating to search, apply, search, apply, search, apply - I've been there. Please don't forget that luck is a major factor. You have to be a good candidate at the right time at the right company and you have to interview well. That's a lot of things that must align. It's a numbers game so keep trying to increase your odds. If you want to win at a casino, you have to throw some chips down. Think of the time you spend searching for jobs as your chips.

If you were to find a \$40,000/yr job, you would earn about \$109/day. Every day you go without that job is costing you \$109.

Now, get to work!

Appendix A: List of Entry level job titles

Analytical Services Technician I
Assistant Chemist
Assistant Immunologist I
Associate
Associate Applications Scientist
Associate Chemical Engineer
Associate Engineer
Associate Formulations Scientist
Associate Manufacturing Engineer
Associate Microbiologist
Associate Pilot Plant Technical Specialist
Associate Product Engineer
Associate Professional
Associate QC Microbiologist
Associate Quality Engineer
Associate Research Scientist
Associate Scientist
Associate Scientist II
Bioanalytical Associate Analyst
Biochemist
Biochemist I
Biological Technician
Biorepository Assistant
Cell Culture Technician
Chemist I
Clinical Data Associate
Clinical Lab Scientist I
Clinical Project Associate
Clinical Research Associate I
Clinical Research Technician
Clinical Trials Assistant
Cytogenetic Scientist
Cytotechnologist
Development Associate I
Engineer I
Fermentation Associate
Field Service Engineer
Formulation Development Associate
Formulation Scientist
Formulations Technician I
Health Physics Technologist

Histotechnologist
Imaging Technician
Junior Peptide Chemist
Lab Analyst
Lab Assistant
Lab Associate I
Lab Scientist
Lab Technician I/II
Laboratory Protein Chemist/Biotechnologist
Lot Release Associate I
Manufacturing Associate
Manufacturing Engineer
Manufacturing Technician
Manufacturing Technology Associate II
Marketing Assistant
Metrology Support Specialist
Microbiologist
Microbiology Technician
Necropsy Technician II
Oligonucleotide Production Technician
Peptide Synthesis Technician
Pilot Production Technician I / II
Process Development Associate
Process Engineer
Process Engineer I
Process Technician II
Product Development Chemist I
Product Development Engineer I
Product Engineer I
Production Associate
Production Scientist I
Production Technician
Purification Associate
Purification Development Associate
QA Associate
QA Auditor
QA Auditor I
QA Documentation Associate
QA Line Inspector
QA Operations Associate
QC Analyst
QC Analytical Associate
QC Associate Chemist
QC Associate I

QC Lab Coordinator
QC Microbiology Analyst
QC Technician
Quality Development Program Associate
Quality Engineer
R&D Engineer
Reagent Manufacturing Associate
Regulatory Affairs Associate
Regulatory Affairs Specialist
Research Assistant
Research Associate I/II
Research Manufacturing Associate I
Research Scientist I
Research Specialist
Research Technician
Safety Engineer
Scientific Associate
Scientific Programmer
Scientific Technical Writer
Scientist I
Specimen Management Associate
Technical Operations Engineer
Technician
Technologist I
Test & Release Engineer
Validation Associate