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Guide to Careers 2024-25





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Welcome to the latest edition of the Varsity Guide to Careers!

Throughout our time at *Varsity*, we have both had the pleasure of seeing our friends and colleagues graduate into amazing careers in journalism. Meanwhile, through our faculties, colleges, and other pursuits, we've seen Cambridge alumnus moving into medical research, law, creative industries, academia, and much much more.

While having seen others do such great things has been a joy, it's understandable that those of us who are still students sometimes feel unsure about what's next. This guide will offer a glimpse into some of the options available, if you're not sure which step will be best for you.

Studying at Cambridge – and making the most of all the other opportunities available to us here – is the perfect preparation for the world beyond academics. We hope that this guide will offer you a sense of security: there are limitless doors waiting to be opened.

We would like to wish you every success and happiness as you go about your degrees and future endeavours.

Alice & Grace



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Finding my way...

Meg Byrom graduated from Queens' College in 2023 with a degree in HSPS.

In June 2023, the words 'I am sorry to inform you...' had graced my email inbox hundreds of times. I didn't have a job lined up, I couldn't afford to do a masters in journalism and had found myself at a graduation-shaped dead end.

But, two weeks before I'd walk from Queens' College to Senate House and leave a Cantab, I received a call from The Daily Mail's trainee scheme. I had interviewed for the scheme a few months earlier and had been rejected. However, there had been a dropout.

A position was open for a trainee reporter working on the daily newspaper, conditional on me gaining an NCTJ (a journalism qualification in the UK). I accepted.

I moved back to my family home in Warrington to study for it at News Associates in Manchester. I commuted for almost two hours each way in the pitch black of winter, practising shorthand on overpacked and delayed Northern trains for six months. I spent the weekends teaching English virtually to students in South Korea to get by. I also completed a placement every week with the *Liverpool Echo*.

Then, in January, I finished my NCTJ and moved to London to start at the *Mail*.

It may be a controversial title, but the *Mail* sets the national agenda and continues to draw in thousands of readers at a challenging time for the industry - for any young journalist, it's an excellent place to learn.

I've been given a lot of responsibility since day one. I've covered stories high on the news agenda as well as breaking news. I have worked across *The Mail* on *Sunday* and MailOnline and

often late-edit the paper which means I am responsible for any late copy or new stories.

My biggest advice for recent or upcoming grads is that a "dream" job should give you the lifestyle that you want, not just a career.



In the Cambridge bubble, ultra competitiveness can lead many of us to aim and achieve highly but in doing so, we often throw away looking after ourselves.

If you want to have lots of hobbies, travel or spend time with friends and family, an all-consuming job is never going to make you truly happy - no matter how nice your pay packet might be or how many people might stalk your LinkedIn.

This has been a real point of maturity for me. I love my work, but it's been important to me to identify what my priorities are and try to build a career around them.

If newspapers stopped being sold tomorrow and I never worked in the media again I'd still have lots of other forms of happiness - I am proud of that.

For now, I have just moved to west London with my boyfriend of three years who I met at Cambridge.

Growing up, I always wanted to do a job where writing was my bread and butter - I feel incredibly lucky that is my reality now.



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Hints and tips for preparing your CV

Huzzah! You battled your way to secure a place at Cambridge, wrestled with your assignments, and the end of your hard work that stretches back beyond your time at the University of Cambridge moves ever closer to a triumphant conclusion. So what next? With this in mind, it is never too soon to prepare an outstanding CV so that you're poised to attack the next phase of your life. What is the best approach to tackling this challenging task? Let me help. Here's the advice I provide to my clients, which I hope you find useful.

A vital aspect of applications, your CV is a marketing tool for you to showcase your academic achievements, as well as your work, voluntary and extra-curricular experience. As such, I generally recommend a word count of circa 800-1000 words within two pages, which provides ample opportunity to include valuable key words and phrases without the CV looking cluttered. (Should you have publications and other academic details to list it is acceptable to increase the page count).

As we all know, first impressions count. So, choosing a template is the first step in creating or updating your CV. Clear headings will help guide the reader through the content, and using one sans serif font (a plain typeface, e.g. Calibri and Aptos) throughout is the best approach to the design of a CV template. There are some fantastic examples online; however, do be cautious about the inclusion of icons, logos or images, as these can't be read by many ATS systems (applicant tracking systems many employers use to filter applicants' CVs).

The next exciting task is to write a profile that succinctly details your educational background and any relevant experience you have gained. Recruiters are looking to quickly 'pigeonhole' an applicant, so give them plenty of facts, as well as sprinkling a few insights into your professional 'personality' into the profile - all within circa 100 words. This important section of your CV sets the professional tone of voice from the first line.

Feel free to use a first person narrative or a neutral prose; however, I suggest avoiding use of a third person narrative as it always leaves me wondering, who wrote this CV for the applicant?! Once you've nailed the profile, adding a separate 'Key Skills' section can help the recruiter to quickly scan the key word content against their criteria. Next on page one should be your education details including the title of your thesis, especially if this is closely related to your chosen career path.

Ideally your relevant work experience should start to appear within the first half of the first page and will fully detail your current key skills, experience and competencies. Given that most recruiters state that they spend about 20 seconds on an initial skim read, the first page of your CV is key to capturing the attention of the reader.

Often viewed as the most challenging aspect of writing your own CV, an achievements-led approach provides helpful context for a recruiter. Detailing your specific actions and the results can help move the information from generic to notable in a fiercely competitive graduate jobs market. Recruiters often look for measurable information, so providing facts and figures works well.

Once you have the framework of a great CV, do ensure the CV contains the key words and reflects the professional content of any job description and person specification provided, ensuring alignment with your target roles where possible. Optimising your CV with key words is crucial, so assigning time to analyse key word content before each application and making minor adjustments can significantly increase your chances of being called to interview, the ultimate goal of every CV.

I wish you every success!

Sarah Lovell

Finding my way...

Ellie Austin graduated from Clare College in 2023 with a degree in Natural Sciences.

The last 12 months of my degree can be summarised with one question: "So, what are you doing after you graduate?" On reflection, it feels like I gave a different answer each time I was asked: "Oh, I'm hoping to do a PhD in Scotland", "I think I'll probably take a break and go travelling for a while", "No, mum, I'm not going to work for Shell and 'change them from the inside'". In the end, what I decided to do was focus on my exams and my masters project (and the *Mays* 31), all of which were becoming only slightly overwhelming, and officially kick the can of my future plans down past graduation road.

I ended up applying for an internship the second I submitted my masters project because, apparently, I'm allergic to peace. My only concrete attempt at making any future plans and, somehow, I landed the job: Research Communications Assistant at Cambridge Zero. After years of using journalism to escape from my science degree, I stumbled from graduation into a job writing press releases about climate change research. Perhaps unsurprisingly, having studied earth sciences for four years, I loved it.

Now let's break down what a job title like that actually means: translating scientific jargon into big flashy headlines for a university press office. I built a research map and started to write about how Cambridge academics were trying to fix the world, from the classic hard-core science (think: hiding greenhouse gases inside the ground, building super-fast solar panels) to fields like climate litigation, where lawyers are taking governments to court for failing to protect their people from the effects of climate change. I ran our social media accounts, photographed our conferences, interviewed academics and students, and, as soppy as it sounds, I picked up a bit of hope for the future of our planet along the way.

Fast forward 15 months and I'm sitting in Geneva, Switzerland, where I recently moved to start a job at the World Economic Forum. "What???", I hear my younger self exclaim.

Well, I loved my job in communications, but as I venture out of the Cambridge bubble, I'm slowly discovering that there's a big wide world out there (who knew?).

As a geologist, I don't have to choose between a PhD or working in Big Oil. People with a science background are in high demand for all sorts of industries. I have scientist friends consulting companies on how to follow the environmental regulations drafted by my other scientist friends inside government departments. I have scientist friends making wacky ideas into businesses, and other scientist friends working to legally protect these inventions. Then there's me, bringing companies and governments together to debate how they can collectively reduce their impact on the environment, whilst balancing all of their competing priorities.

This isn't the final stop in the road either. I'm quite certain there are many more jobs out there, perhaps even some that haven't been invented yet. I'm not sure where I'll end up, if there even is such a thing as "ending up" in one final place, but I'm looking forward to finding out.



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The Path to Healthcare Consulting: A Cambridge Graduate's Experience



Sona Popat is a recent Biological Natural Sciences graduate from Downing College, University of Cambridge. She graduated with a First Class degree before joining **Costello Medical** as a **Medical Writer** in September 2021. She now works as a **Senior Medical Writer** in our London office. You can connect with Sona on LinkedIn here: [linkedin.com/in/sona-popat/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sona-popat/)

As a recent Cambridge graduate, I will share some insights into what healthcare consulting involves, how my degree prepared me for this role, and some of the skills and attributes that have helped me work in this field in this article. Transitioning from studying to the world of work has been both challenging and rewarding, and I hope my experiences can inspire you as you consider your own career options.

I chose to study a broad degree like Natural Sciences at university because I was fascinated by a range of scientific areas. This curiosity and interest in different areas of science initially drew me to my role at Costello Medical, as I get to explore many different aspects of health and disease, and work on different project types. My degree equipped me with a strong understanding of the scientific process, which I now apply to my work. Completing lab projects, collecting and analysing data, and writing up results were all part of my university experience, and these skills are directly relevant to my current role.

As a Senior Medical Writer, my typical week involves a variety of tasks that keep me engaged and constantly learning. I provide strategic input to clients, review the latest data outputs from clinical trials, and discuss how best to present these findings. I also review and write publications, such as abstracts, posters, and manuscripts. Whilst I still do some writing myself, which is a part of the job that I enjoy immensely, I also have the opportunity in my Senior role to work with a team of Analysts and Medical Writers. Giving feedback to help them improve their writing and progress in their careers is a hugely rewarding part of my job.

One of the things I enjoy most about my role is the opportunity to work across a broad range of projects. Working across publications, rare diseases, and pro bono projects, I have had the chance to learn about different disease areas, such

as rheumatology, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. This variety keeps things interesting – no two days are the same! I am also able to explore my interests in increasingly important areas like patient engagement and health equity in some of my work.

My degree set me up well for this role by providing me with practical skills, such as time management, communication, and critical thinking. These skills are essential in my day-to-day work, whether I am writing up scientific data, managing a team, or planning project timelines to ensure we meet deadlines. Writing for the science section of Varsity magazine during my time at university also helped me develop broader writing skills and think about how to communicate effectively to different audiences.

If you are considering a role in this sector, my advice is to follow your interests in healthcare: take modules on physiology, pharmacology, or the biology of disease, and attend lectures or webinars on topics that interest you. Writing about scientific advancements for university publications can also be useful if you want to give medical writing and communication a try. Getting involved in research projects, either as part of your degree or through hackathons or societies, can also provide valuable experience in data analysis and presentation.

Importantly, remember to follow your interests outside of healthcare and science, too. Spending time on sports, music, or exploring your other interests will help develop soft skills and diverse perspectives that will be helpful, no matter which career path you choose. In consulting, communication, teamwork, and having new ideas are just as important as practical scientific skills.

I hope my experiences have given you some insight into the exciting and rewarding world of medical writing and healthcare consulting. Good luck with your future career paths!

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SCAN ME

Finding my way...

Robyn Schaffer graduated from Downing College in 2018 with a degree in Classics.

When I joined Cambridge in 2015, I never imagined myself where I am now. I studied Classics at Downing College, wanting to eventually work in fashion journalism – but here I am today in the Civil Service (more on that later).

I found my first year at Cambridge really hard. Like a lot of freshers, I had that feeling of impostor syndrome and not being good enough academically. But luckily things fell into place in second year. Writing for *Varsity* played a big part in helping me find my ‘place’ at Cambridge. I wrote a column for the fashion section and was fashion editor for a few terms, which pushed me outside my comfort zone and gave me a confidence boost.

After graduating I moved home to London and took a gap year, working for six months before travelling around Southeast Asia. When I came home I thought I’d just apply for a few jobs and stroll straight into one, but that wasn’t the case, so I panicked and applied last-minute for the Journalism MA course at City University in London. It turned out to be one of the best decisions I’ve made; from traditional news journalism, to podcasting and media law, I learnt so much from studying in an environment so completely different to Cambridge.

Unfortunately, the pandemic hit halfway through the course, so I finished my MA at home and soon got a job as a content writer for a health and wellness brand. I still wanted to get into more traditional journalism though, so after a few months I started applying for grad schemes at national newspapers and got a place on the *Daily Mail*’s sub-editing scheme.

For reasons you might suspect, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to apply initially. But a friend who was already on the scheme encouraged me to, insisting it would be a valuable experience. And they were right. Working at the *Mail* was challenging for a number of reasons, but it was a huge

learning curve and working on editions for historical occasions – like the night the Queen died and the King’s coronation – was surreal. They were unique experiences which I’ll never forget.

After almost two years, it felt like time to move on, which leads me to where I am now. I joined the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as a press officer just over a year ago, which is something I had never considered.

But when I saw the job advertised it sounded perfect for me. I had realised I didn’t want to be a journalist long-term, but this job still would allow me to write and be creative within areas I’d always been interested in.

My team helps communicate the policies and messages of the department to the public and the media. As I work on the media, creative industries and tourism brief, I work closely with lots of journalists who cover those areas, getting them information and quotes for their stories, sending them press releases and chatting to them on the phone.

We also work with the Culture Secretary and other ministers, helping them prepare for interviews and write statements, accompanying them to events and shaping their comms strategies. There is never a dull day – one day I might be working on London Fashion Week and the next we’ll be touring a film studio. The Civil Service has been great at encouraging me to be ambitious and try new things, but help and support is there when you need it.

I currently live in north London with my boyfriend and I’m still very close with my friends from Cambridge, who fortunately all live in London too. Everyone says it, but make the most of your time in Cambridge. Try everything, ask all the questions, get work experience where you can, but don’t worry if your ‘plan’ doesn’t materialise. I’m quite glad mine didn’t.





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We value innovation and excellence in everything we do, encouraging employees to take ownership of their work. We believe that our colleagues must consistently feel stimulated and supported in order to reach their full potential and achieve our ambitious goals.

Careers in engineering, science & technology

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At ECM Selection in Cambridge, our personal approach is there to provide you with exciting options when you are looking for a job in software, electronics, mechanical engineering, mathematics, physics, or the applied sciences. Over the years, we have worked with graduates, PhDs and postdocs as well as experienced industry veterans, throughout their careers.

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We work with commercial R&D teams in product development and applied technology, often with a strong scientific angle, offering opportunities for innovation with long term career progression.

Why should I use a recruitment agency?

It's important for your CV to stand out from the crowd since graduate and PhD-level competition is very high. A recruiter who knows the company well can advise and guide here and on interviews and job offers. Provided they have a sufficiently strong reputation, and are specifically engaged by the company and understand their business, a recruiter's introduction can be a real asset.

Don't you just find jobs on the internet, and suggest them to people?

Far from it. All the roles ECM offer are with companies who specifically asked for our help, are pleased to hear from us and many of whom we have known and been building

relationships with for years. Our personal approach extends to decision makers at companies as well!

I've heard stories about variable experiences with recruitment agencies. Why are ECM different?

Whilst some agencies may match keywords to recruit in technical areas they don't fully understand, ECM consultants all have technical backgrounds and industry experience in the sectors for which we recruit. Some agencies are also primarily concerned with filling a particular job, rather than finding the right role for the person. In contrast, ECM offer a more personal, relaxed and "non-pushy" service. There are no salespeople here and we don't spend our days talking people into things. We'd rather find ideas for people that they like, and will help them progress their career in whatever direction they choose.

Sounds like a great service, but is there a catch? Do I need to pay...

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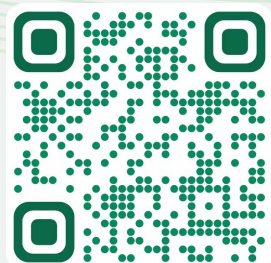
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Let's go round again

Lotte Brundle graduated from Hughes Hall in 2022 with a degree in English.

Autumn has always got a sense of starting again – a thought I've had each time I've written a piece for the *Varsity* careers guide (this being the third. Call me a veteran. Or just old). Each of these three years, the last of two in which I have not been in Cambridge, have been starkly different. This autumn, I hit the midpoint between 20 and 30 and it was all change again.

A new job, a new home and a new relationship mean that I've been living in a state of transition for the past couple of months. But, now the dust has settled, I'm looking forward to getting stuck into the new things in my life.

London, now, feels less new to me, but I'm still not used to it. I also don't know if I like it. I've now been here for just over a year. It is still just as big, just as expensive, just as crowded and just as stinky as when I arrived, albeit slightly less scary. I'm getting the hang of it, I think, but I certainly wouldn't live here if it wasn't for my career ambition. I was in Norfolk the other day, where my Dad is from, and a five bedroom, three bathroom house with a garden in Diss was cheaper to rent for a month than my two-bed flat in Brixton. It is hard to justify living here sometimes.

Finding accommodation initially was also a challenge. Scratch that. Finding accommodation was easy. Finding accommodation where I felt safe and which was affordable and not over an hour commute to university (I moved to London for my journalism masters) was a challenge.

At first I lived with a woman in Clapham and her anxious whippet, in a cold house in which I was one of two lodgers and couldn't bring back guests (*au revoir* sex life) or open and close doors at night because it would wake my live-in landlady up (*bonjour* weeing with the door ajar). This cost me £800 a month (bills and shivering whippet included). I wouldn't normally talk about money in an article like this, but for anyone considering moving to London I thought this could be a useful reference point. My mum also kindly paid my rent. Again, as a reference point.

Clapham was nice, in theory, danger weeing and enforced celibacy aside. But I was far less rich and far less gilleted than the rest of the yummy mummy population and quite liked the abstract idea of having a microwave, heating that was switched on and the option of a bedfellow, so in January I moved again. To Lewisham.

If you find the sound of ambulance sirens soothing, let me tell you, Lewisham's the place for you. The move brought a new set of compromises. It was much less central – a 15 minute walk to a National Rail station instead of being near a tube line – and involved sharing with three people, two of them strangers. £800 a month including bills.

It was a little far out and had no real living room (we had a small unfurnished room the size of a bathroom with a wobbly tray table to eat on). But compared to being a lodger, it was paradise. However, I was lonely. As a household we kept to ourselves and as a student I didn't have lots of money to go out loads and none of my friends lived nearby. At times I felt like I lived by myself. Fortunately (though it felt unfortunate at the time) eight months into what was supposed to be a year-long contract, we were given our months notice to leave.

After a long job hunt that had lasted the final six months of my masters, I finally landed my dream job but was soon to have no place to live. I was anxious about having to do the six-hour round-trip on public transport from my family home each day while I searched for somewhere. Luckily a close friend from Cambridge and her boyfriend were moving to London. He found us an amazing new place just 30 minutes from my office. He works from home and has full use of our flat's home office, and the bigger bedroom which means I got away with paying just £875 a month for rent (bills not included). A steal for somewhere so well connected.

I am settled for now, but this time next year our renting year will be up. Will I be somewhere new then? What else will have changed? Things are looking pretty good right now, so I'm hoping it will just be my salary that's different next year.



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