

advice
Architecture
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JOB SEEKER WORKBOOK

How to get your first architecture jobs!

You can be the top of your architecture studio class and still feel unprepared for your first architecture job, and unsure how to go about getting it, right?

My First Architecture Job is the only dedicated resource and community for Australian architecture students and recent graduates to find support, knowledge, and networks to bridge the gap between architecture school and feeling confident in your first job.

Who are you talking to?



Sarah Lebner registered 18 months after graduation, and quickly rose to the position of Principal Architect at multidisciplinary firm, Light House Architecture and Science.

She recently launched her own dream practice, Cooe Architecture, focusing on low-carbon regional homes.

In 2020 she was the recipient of the Australian Institute of Architect's National Emerging Architect Prize, and in 2023 she was selected for the AIA Dulux Study Tour.

This workbook won't work unless you actually do it.

I've been there. I've downloaded the free online course and excitedly flipped through it and then thought "well, I've read it all so what difference will it make if I fill it in or not?" Let me tell you with great certainty - it will make every difference.

This workbook may not even tell you anything you didn't already know - but it CAN help you organise yourself and put a plan into action. So please, take yourself seriously, grab a pen, and tackle each section in this book.

The first bit is super easy. Just write your name and the date below:

"If I'm serious about getting a great job, I will use this workbook to my full advantage."

Signed:

The date I signed this page:

The date I plan to have completed the workbook (we recommend 1-3 weeks):

YOUR PORTFOLIO AND RESUME

This workbook isn't about creating an excellent portfolio and resume - there are plenty of online resources and templates to help you get that done (**find our own Portfolio and Resume Creation Workbook at www.myfirstarchitecturejob.com/shop**).

However, before we get started on putting them to use, I recommend checking the following:

- Does it look professional and well designed? The design quality of your resume and CV says as much about your skills as the actual projects you put in them.
- Is it easy to read? Employers will often scan a large number of resumes. Use layout, hierarchy and font to help them out.
- Ask three people to check it for spelling and grammatical errors.
- Ask three people to give you their opinion on the organisation, design/layout, and whether it communicates your talents effectively.

Tip: if you're not great at writing, layouts, or graphic design, then outsource it! Ask a friend, or access a freelancing network like Fiverr, Upwork or Airtasker. Canva is also a great free online resource for creating professional layouts. Don't feel bad - most architecture firms also outsource their marketing material! But do be honest about this if it comes up in an interview - turn your lack of time or skill in to a demonstration of your innovation and problem solving.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

The process outlined below assumes that you are contacting firms that may not necessarily be advertising. A large portion of jobs in our industry are filled by word of mouth, or by hiring someone who has expressed interest. This doesn't mean you should ignore job boards or vacant positions! Just be sure to apply the lessons distilled in the following pages when responding to an advertised position.

1. SET YOUR GOALS

2. BRAINSTORM POSSIBLE FIRMS THAT MATCH GOALS

3. RESEARCH AND SHORTLIST TOP THREE FIRMS

4. SELF ASSESS TO DEVELOP BEST CONTACT APPROACH

5. CREATE AND ACTION YOUR PLAN

6. QUESTION THIS WORKBOOK

7. REPEAT IF NECESSARY

8. LET US KNOW HOW IT GOES

SET YOUR GOALS

It might be tempting to just throw yourself out there and take whatever comes back. But why do this if you can possibly start with something that suits your ambitions much better? Take a moment to consider the following questions and jot down some answers.

LOCATION: Where do you currently live? Is this the location you want to look for a job? Do you ultimately want to move to a different location in time? If so, brainstorm where this might be and in what timeline you would like to do this.

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EXPERIENCE: What experience do you want from this job? Do you want to work on residential, commercial, or public projects?

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WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE: What type of firm do you hope for in regards to firm size, office culture (younger/well established, formal/casual), and methodology (lots of interaction with builders, known for winning architecture awards)?

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REMUNERATION: What do you want in return? What are your expectations for salary, mentoring, working overtime/work flexibility? (Visit www.fairwork.gov.au/awards-and-agreements/awards/list-of-awards for the latest minimum rates.)

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BRAINSTORM FIRMS

Create a broad list of all the firms that could possibly suit you and may have a job for you. Don't get too bogged down at this stage - just focus on the 'deal-breaker' elements of your goals. These might be criteria such as location, firm size and type of project work.

1. Start with a simple Google search in your target location. Houzz.com also has an increasingly broad database of architects.
2. Review recent award winners relative to your goals, i.e. the Institute of Architects awards in your state, in the category relevant to the projects you are interested in. You could also look at other awards like the Australian Sustainability Awards.
3. Ask someone! Talk to a trusted tutor or lecturer, or more experienced friend. Because they know you, they may be able to easily identify firms that will suit you and even put you in contact.
4. Attend events and network. (This method is essentially how I've found the three jobs I've had.) Attend local Institute of Architects events (contact SONA for the student arm of the Institute.) TIP: If you can't afford membership, ask which events are free/open to attend for students. Embrace other relationships such as chatting to guest panel members, attend industry events like showroom openings or design festival events.

NOTE: The last two points are excellent for putting yourself in the position to hear about firms that may be looking to hire - especially those who won't go to the effort of advertising. They take a lot more effort than the first two, but will likely be far more beneficial.

RESEARCH AND SHORTLIST

1. Take the list above and compare it against the finer details of your goals to shortlist your top three.
2. Find out the following things about your three firms - this will equip you for approaching them in an effective way.

FIRM ONE:

Location:.....

Type of work:.....

Firm size/structure:.....

Who is the boss/management team and what do you know about them:.....

.....

Office culture:.....

Services offered:.....

.....

Any other information? Do they have a blog or social media account?.....

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Choose one of their projects that you like and familiarise yourself with it. Note some details about it here:.....

.....

.....

FIRM TWO:

Location:.....

Type of work:.....

Firm size/structure:.....

Who is the boss/management team and what do you know about them:.....

.....

Office culture:.....

Services offered:.....

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Any other information? Do they have a blog or social media account?.....

.....

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Choose one of their projects that you like and familiarise yourself with it. Note some details about it here:.....

.....

.....

FIRM THREE:

Location:.....

Type of work:.....

Firm size/structure:.....

Who is the boss/management team and what do you know about them:.....

.....

Office culture:.....

Services offered:.....

.....

Any other information? Do they have a blog or social media account?.....

.....

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Choose one of their projects that you like and familiarise yourself with it. Note some details about it here:.....

.....

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SELF ASSESSMENT

Now it's time to reflect on your strengths and weaknesses to determine how to best approach this firm.

Do you think you come across best in person, on the phone, or in writing?
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Please note that cold contacting a firm via email will rarely lead to a job - most firms receive generic expressions of interest frequently. The purpose of this question is to be aware of maximising your strengths and working on your weaknesses.

What skills can you offer these firms?

IDEAS: Drafting, graphics, office programs, communication, organisation, willingness to learn, past job experience, etc.

Firm one:

Firm two:

Firm three:

What excites you about each firm?

IDEAS: Type of work they are doing, their team or senior staff, location, culture, experience.

Firm one:

Firm two:

Firm three:

Why do you think you're a good match for each firm?

IDEAS: Personality, area of interest, something their team is missing, looking for a firm to 'grow in to'. If you feel completely 'green' you can even suggest that you are the perfect blank slate for them to train - there's always a positive spin.

Firm one:

Firm two:

Firm three:

What do you want to get out of working for each firm?

IDEAS: Certain experience, exposure to a type of project, working with someone from the firm, potential career growth, pay and conditions, potential to work for their other firms and grow with them long term.

Firm one:

Firm two:

Firm three:

QUESTION THIS WORKBOOK

The process so far is based on my own experiences, as well as what I've learnt from mentoring other students and helping them find a job. Please take a moment now to be critical of this process so far and question whether there's anything you think you should do differently that will suit you and your personal circumstances better.

CREATE AND ACTION YOUR PLAN

You are now equipped to contact your ideal firms. All of the preparation you have done in the previous pages will help you to approach firms in a way that will help you stand out from other candidates.

The following should only be a starting point or 'scaffold' for creating your action plan. Review what you know about yourself and the firm to tailor it for both of you. The process suggested below aims to make you more visible, more credible, and more eager than other people who might be contacting them.

PREPARE

Find out who you should contact in each firm by asking your reference person or calling and asking. If you call, use this opportunity to potentially plant a seed - you might like to use the following script:

"Hi. My name is [your name] and I'm an architecture student interested in working with your firm. I was hoping you could let me know who I should address my expression of interest to, would it be [person you think it is]?"

This demonstrates that you have done your research. After you've received confirmation, ask what their best contact email is and if you can drop a physical copy of your expression of interest in as well. You might like to finish with something like:

"Thanks for your time, I'm really interested in the work your firm is doing, especially jobs like [insert project you researched], so I'll definitely be in touch. Could you please let [contact person they have given you] know that I'll be sending through my expression of interest tomorrow [or other time]. My name is [your name]."

Research has shown that saying your name last helps it stick in the listener's memory.

APPROACH

Prepare a cover letter that is personalised for their firm. Include:

- Mention that you contacted the firm as above
- Specifically list the skills you think could be of value to them
- Demonstrate an eagerness to learn and the potential and personal fit you think you have with their firm
- Show that you have researched their firm by using names, or referencing projects, blogs, etc.
- Finish by saying that you will come in at a certain time to drop of a physical copy of your expression of interest and resume/portfolio

Send away!

SECONDARY APPROACH

Demonstrate your credibility by visiting the firm in person, at the time you said you would, to deliver a physical copy of your expression of interest and resume and portfolio. When you do this, mention that you've been in contact with [contact person] and ask whether you could very briefly introduce yourself to them. Don't be disappointed if this doesn't eventuate - they are likely very busy and not used to meeting students dropping off resumes. Hopefully, they will be impressed by your effort to follow up in person and take the time to say hello.

Finish by asking when you might expect to hear from them or when you should get back in touch with them (depending on which approach is most suitable.)

FOLLOW UP

Stick to your word and hold them to theirs! Phone (don't email) either at the time you said you would, or if you haven't heard from them within the window they suggested.

SEEK FEEDBACK

If you are unsuccessful, firstly ask if you should get in touch again at some point in the future, and ask them if they would be generous enough to provide you with any feedback or recommend any other architects they should contact.

I had a friend who was hired purely because he called the firm back exactly six months later (when they had suggested he should contact them again). They were impressed by his commitment to them and organisation. I've also referred a few unsuccessful candidates for jobs at my own workplace with architects that I felt suited them. So remember to make the most of every interaction, even if it doesn't plan out in the way you initially hoped it would.

REPEAT IF NECESSARY

If you get offered an interview from one of your top three firms - that's fantastic! You might like to purchase our **Job Interview Preparation Booklet**.



JOB INTERVIEW PREPARATION WORKBOOK

*How to nail your first architecture job
interview in ten steps!*

If you don't get an interview from your top three, then try to seek feedback from them and repeat the process with your next three candidates. Failure is a sign that you tried - which is the only way to succeed! Keep seeking opportunities listed in steps 3 and 4, from page 7, to maximise your chances of reaching out to a firm that is in need of student architects at the time.

If you really are having no luck, and are feeling disheartened, I would recommend finding a mentor - but that's a topic for another time!

Please let me know how it goes!

Thank you and well done for taking the time to do this workbook. As you know, My First Architecture Job has only launched recently, and we're hoping to build a large network of students and graduates so that we can deliver a wide range of information, products and services to you. We're currently working on a book that will be published in 2019, and brainstorming a range of workshops and courses.

We would really appreciate it if you could help spread the word by letting your friends know about us, and we would absolutely love to hear any feedback on this workbook and if it helps you get a job! Please let us know! Hearing success stories motivates us to keep doing what we do!

Good luck!

- Sarah

**101 Things I Didn't
Learn in Architecture
School**
*(and wish I'd known
before my first job)*

Sarah Lebner

p.s. For further tips and advice for landing on your feet in your first job, please check out my recently published book. For a book preview and purchase information, visit myfirstarchitecturejob.com/book

POST SCRIPT!

Video Resumes

Since creating this workbook, I've developed the following article and How To guide on Video resumes:

www.myfirstarchitecturejob.com/articles/videoresume

All the platforms around us are switching to video. Blogs include video features, online news articles have video excerpts, and our social media seems to be pushing us towards reels. Why? Because video is effective and engaging.

I predict that at some point in the future, it will be standard practice to send video introductions and resumes. The benefits are big; video is not only a far more effective form of communication than a traditional resume, but it also saves the employer a whole lot of time. You can communicate so much more in video format than you could dream of getting across in a CV.

Until the point at which these are commonplace, taking on this format means you will stand out as a brave innovator and communicator, which is exactly the kind of skills architecture firms are looking for.

KEEP IN MIND:

THE CAREER MOMENTUM COURSE

Keep in mind our premium offering, the Career Momentum Course. You can view a free sample at the link below.

www.myfirstarchitecturejob.com/articles/course

This sample discusses performance reviews, promotion, minimum salaries and pay scale creation.

Consider joining the self-paced Career Momentum Course to access 11 other topics:

Career Direction:

- Being True to Yourself
- Immigrant Careers
- Entrepreneurial Careers
- Approaching Registration

Skills Development:

- Fine-Tuning Soft Skills
- Powerful Communication
- Rethinking Imposter Syndrome
- Time Management
- Networking

Taking Action:

- Career Momentum & Relevancy
- Career Progression & Promotion (video sample above)
- Finding and Working with a Mentor

Each section of the course includes:

- Video lesson
- 2 worksheets per lesson
- Supplementary notes and resources

PLUS you can access quarterly virtual group reflection and mentoring sessions.