NURTURING EXPECTATIONS

CAREER BY DESIGN

High School *Path Guide*

Your first resume, your first interview, and how to start strong.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

How to Use This Guide

This guide is for high school students who are looking for their first job, internship, or volunteer opportunity, or who just want to be prepared before they need it.

You do not need years of work experience to get started. This guide will walk you through exactly what you have, how to present it, and how to make a great impression, from the first application to the first interview.

Everyone starts somewhere. The goal of this guide is to make sure your starting point is as strong as it can be.

PART 1

What You Already Have

Your Experience Is a Story Waiting to Be Told

Most high school students think they have nothing to put on a resume because they've never had a 'real job.' That's not true.

Employers hiring high school students are not expecting years of professional experience. They are looking for responsibility, reliability, and the ability to work with others. You have more evidence of those qualities than you realize.

But before you can tell someone what you've done, you have to understand it yourself. The exercise below teaches you one of the most important career skills you'll ever develop: the ability to look at your own experience and pull out the story inside it.

What Counts as Experience at the High School Level

- Part-time and summer jobs: even one shift a week at a retail store or restaurant is real work experience.
- Babysitting, pet sitting, lawn care, tutoring: these are small businesses. You found clients, showed up reliably, and delivered a service. That counts.
- Sports and athletic teams: shows teamwork, commitment, handling pressure, and coachability.
- School clubs and organizations: especially leadership roles (captain, president, treasurer, committee chair).
- Volunteer work and community service: demonstrates initiative and a commitment to something beyond yourself.
- Family responsibilities: if you help care for siblings, manage household tasks, or contribute to a family business, that is real responsibility.
- Personal projects: a YouTube channel, a small Etsy shop, organizing a neighborhood fundraiser. These show initiative and follow-through.

The key is not what you did. It's what it demonstrates. Every experience has a story inside it worth telling. The three questions below will help you find it.

The Three Questions

For any experience worth including on your resume or talking about in an interview, ask yourself:

- What happened? Briefly describe the situation: where you were, what was going on, what needed to be done.
- What did YOU do specifically? Not the group, not the team: you. What was your individual contribution?
- What was different because of you? Did something improve, get done, or change as a result of what you did?

You don't need perfect answers. You're not writing a speech. You're practicing the habit of thinking about your experience with intention. That habit will follow you through every job search you ever do.

Story Mining Worksheet

Work through the three questions for each experience that applies to you. Don't filter. Fill in what you can and come back to the rest.

Story Mining: What's Already in Your Experience?			
Experience	**What happened? (Brief context: where you were, what was going on)**	**What did YOU do specifically? (Your individual action)**	**What was different because of you? (Result, change, or lesson)**
Part-time or summer job			
Babysitting / pet sitting / lawn care / tutoring			
Sports team or club			
School club or organization			
Student government or leadership role			

Story Mining: What's Already in Your Experience?			
Experience	What happened? (Brief context: where you were, what was going on)	What did YOU do specifically? (Your individual action)	What was different because of you? (Result, change, or lesson)
Volunteering or community service			
Religious or community group			
Art, music, theater, or performance			
Personal project or hobby			
Family responsibilities			

PART 2

Your First Resume

One Page. Clear. Simple. Honest.

Your first resume will be one page. No exceptions. Keep it clean, easy to read, and focused on what you have. A simple, honest resume beats a padded or exaggerated one every time.

What to Include (In This Order)

- Your name and contact information: name, city, phone number, and a professional email address.
- Education: your school, expected graduation year, GPA (if 3.0 or higher), honors, relevant courses.
- Experience: any paid or unpaid work, listed from most recent to oldest.
- Activities and leadership: sports, clubs, student government, volunteering.
- Skills: computer skills, languages, certifications (CPR, food handler's permit, etc.).

A Note on Email Addresses

Your email address is part of your first impression. If your current email is something like 'xXgamer2009Xx@gmail.com', create a new one before you apply anywhere. Use some version of your first and last name. It takes two minutes and makes a real difference.

Writing Your Bullet Points

Each experience should have 2–3 bullet points that describe what you did. Start each bullet with an action verb, a doing word. End with a result or number if you can.

Weak: too vague	Strong: specific and active
Helped at a store	Assisted customers with product questions and operated the cash register during peak weekend hours
Did babysitting	Cared for two children ages 4 and 7 on weekends; managed schedules, meals, and homework assistance
Was on the soccer team	Competed on varsity soccer for 3 years; served as team captain junior year, leading pre-game warm-ups and team communication
Volunteered somewhere	Volunteered 4 hours weekly at a local food pantry; sorted donations and assisted 30+ families during distribution

Resume Draft Worksheet

Use this worksheet to organize your information before building your final resume.

My First Resume: Draft Worksheet	
Full name *Your legal first and last name*	
City & state *City, State: no street address needed*	
Phone number	
Email address *firstname.lastname@gmail.com (not nicknames)*	
Education	
School name	
Expected graduation *Month and year*	
GPA (if 3.0+) *Only include if 3.0 or higher*	
Relevant courses *e.g. Business, Computer Science*	

My First Resume: Draft Worksheet (continued)	
Honors / awards *Honor roll, awards, scholarships*	
Experience (paid or unpaid)	
Job / role 1: title *e.g. Cashier, Babysitter, Volunteer Tutor*	
Job / role 1: where *Name of organization, business, or family*	
Job / role 1: dates *Month/Year – Month/Year (or 'Present')*	
Job / role 1: bullet 1 *Start with an action verb (e.g. 'Managed,' 'Assisted')*	
Job / role 1: bullet 2 *A result or impact if possible*	
Job / role 2: title *e.g. Cashier, Babysitter, Volunteer Tutor*	
Job / role 2: where *Name of organization, business, or family*	
Job / role 2: dates *Month/Year – Month/Year (or 'Present')*	

My First Resume: Draft Worksheet (continued)	
Job / role 2: bullet 1 *Start with an action verb*	
Job / role 2: bullet 2 *A result or impact if possible*	
Activities & Skills	
Activities / clubs *Sports, clubs, organizations, student gov, theater*	
Volunteer work *Community service, church, neighborhood involvement*	
Skills *Computer programs, languages, certifications*	

Resume Dos

DO

- Use a clean, simple font like Arial or Calibri at 10–12pt.
- Keep consistent formatting: if you bold one job title, bold all of them.
- Save your resume as a PDF unless the employer asks for something else.
- Name your file professionally: FirstName_LastName_Resume.pdf

DON'T

- Use photos, graphics, colored backgrounds, or decorative borders.
- List your age, grade level, or a physical description.
- Exaggerate or make anything up: you will be asked about everything on your resume.

PART 3

Professional Communication Basics

How You Communicate Is Part of the Interview

Before you ever sit down for an interview, you've already made an impression: through your email, your voicemail, and how you follow up. These things matter more than most people realize, and they're easy to get right.

Email Rules

- Use a professional email address: your first and last name, not a nickname or gamer tag.
- Write a clear subject line: 'Application for Summer Cashier Position, Alex Rivera.'
- Start with a greeting: 'Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name],' or 'Dear Hiring Manager,' if you don't have a name.
- Keep the body short and to the point: 3–4 sentences is usually enough.
- End with your full name, phone number, and email.
- Proofread before you send: read it out loud. One typo can cost you an interview.
- Respond to emails within 24 hours. If someone reaches out about your application, reply the same day.

Voicemail Rules

If a potential employer calls and you miss it, they will leave a voicemail. You should also be prepared to leave one.

- Set up your voicemail if you haven't: an employer who gets 'this mailbox is full' will move on.
- Record a professional greeting: 'Hi, you've reached [Name]. I'm unable to take your call right now. Please leave your name, number, and a message and I'll get back to you shortly.'
- When leaving a voicemail: state your name, the reason you're calling, your phone number (say it slowly), and the best time to reach you.

Applying for a Job: Email Example	
Subject line	*Application for Summer Cashier Position, Alex Rivera*
Greeting	*Dear Hiring Manager,*
Opening sentence *Name, school, grade, role you're applying for*	*My name is Alex Rivera and I am a junior at Lincoln High School. I am writing to apply for the Summer Cashier position.*
Middle: why you *Why you're interested + 1–2 reasons you're a fit*	*I have two years of experience babysitting and tutoring in my neighborhood, which has taught me how to stay organized, communicate with adults, and show up reliably. I work well with the public and am comfortable in fast-paced settings.*
Closing *Thank them, mention resume, invite next steps*	*I have attached my resume for your review and would welcome the chance to speak at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.*
Sign-off	*Sincerely,* *Alex Rivera* *(312) 555-0194 | alex.rivera@gmail.com*

Thank-You Email After an Interview: Example	
When to send	*The same day as your interview, within 24 hours at most.* *Set a reminder before you leave the building.*
Subject line	*Thank You, Summer Cashier Interview, Alex Rivera*
Opening *Reference the specific role and location*	*Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today about the Summer Cashier position at Westside Market.*
Middle *Name one specific thing from the conversation*	*I really appreciated learning about how your team supports new employees during their first few weeks. It made me even more excited about the opportunity.*
Closing	*I remain very interested in the position and look forward to hearing about next steps. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.*

PART 4

Applying for Your First Job or Internship

Where to Look and How to Apply

Your first job search will probably feel awkward. That's normal. The goal is not perfection, it's momentum. Apply to more places than you think you need to, follow up consistently, and treat every step of the process as a chance to practice.

Where to Look

- In person: walk into local businesses, restaurants, retail stores, and community organizations. Introduce yourself and ask if they're hiring. This still works, especially for first jobs.
- Indeed.com and LinkedIn: search by job title and your city. Filter for part-time and entry-level.
- Your school: talk to your counselor. Many schools have relationships with local employers who hire students.
- Your network: tell every adult you trust that you're looking. Teachers, coaches, neighbors, family friends. Most first jobs come from people you know.
- Internship programs: many companies, hospitals, nonprofits, and government agencies run formal high school internship programs. Search '[your city] high school internship program.'

Before You Apply

- Read the job description carefully. Make sure you meet the basic requirements (age, availability, any certifications needed).
- Customize your resume if possible: move relevant experience to the top.
- Write a short cover email or letter if one is requested. Use the template in Part 3.
- Double-check everything before submitting: spelling, your contact information, and that you've attached the right file.

Following Up

If you haven't heard back within one week of applying, it's appropriate to follow up once. Keep it brief:

> *'Hi [Name], I submitted an application for the [Job Title] position on [date] and wanted to follow up to confirm it was received. I remain very interested in the opportunity and would welcome the chance to speak. Thank you for your time.'*

What to Have Ready Before You Apply Anywhere

- A finished, proofread resume saved as a PDF.
- A professional email address you check regularly.
- Your Social Security number (you'll need it for hiring paperwork, don't include it on your resume).
- The names and contact information of 2–3 references. Always ask permission before listing someone.
- Your availability: know exactly which days and hours you can work.

PART 5

Your First Interview

What to Expect and How to Prepare

Interviews can feel intimidating, but they are a skill, and like any skill, they get easier with practice. Most interviewers for entry-level and high school positions are not trying to trick you. They want to know if you're reliable, pleasant to work with, and genuinely interested in the job.

How to Answer Interview Questions

Many interview questions ask you to talk about something you've done: 'Tell me about a time when...' or 'Give me an example of...' These can feel hard if you've never had a job, but you've already done the work in Part 1.

The secret to a strong answer is simple: tell it as a story with three parts.

Part of your answer	What to cover	Example
Set the scene	Briefly explain the situation: where you were and what was happening.	"I was babysitting two kids on a Saturday when one of them fell off her bike..."
What you did	Explain exactly what YOU did to handle it. Be specific.	"I stayed calm, cleaned the cut, and called their mom right away..."
How it turned out	Describe the result or what you learned.	"She was fine, and her mom thanked me for handling it so well."

You practiced this in Part 1. Look back at your Story Mining Worksheet. Those are your answers. Every story you mined is a potential interview answer waiting to be used.

Before the Interview

- Research the company or organization: know what they do, who their customers are, and why you're interested.
- Re-read the job description: be ready to connect your experience to what they're looking for.
- Practice your answers out loud: don't just think about them. Say them.
- Plan what you'll wear: business casual at minimum. Clean, neat, and appropriate. When in doubt, dress up slightly rather than down.
- Know exactly where you're going and how long it takes to get there. Arrive 5–10 minutes early.
- Bring two printed copies of your resume, a pen, and a small notebook.

During the Interview

- Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and direct eye contact.
- Sit up straight and stay engaged: no slouching, no looking at your phone.
- Listen carefully to the full question before answering. It's okay to take a moment to think.
- Be honest: if you don't know something, say so. 'I haven't had experience with that yet, but I'm a quick learner and I'd be eager to figure it out.'
- Ask at least one question at the end: see the list below.

Questions to Ask at the End of Your Interview

- 'What does a typical day look like in this role?'
- 'What qualities do your best employees tend to have?'
- 'What are the next steps in the hiring process?'
- 'Is there anything about my background I can clarify for you?'

After the Interview

- Send a thank-you email within 24 hours: use the template in Part 3.
- If they gave you a timeline, wait until it passes before following up.
- Reflect on what went well and what you'd do differently next time.

Common Interview Questions: Practice Worksheet	
Common question	**Your answer (draft it here)**
Tell me about yourself. *1–2 sentences: school, grade, and one thing you're proud of. Keep it professional.*	
Why do you want to work here? *Mention something specific about the company or role. Avoid "for the money."*	
What are your strengths? *Pick 1–2 real strengths with a quick example. e.g. "I'm reliable. I've never missed a commitment."*	
What is a weakness you're working on? *Be honest about something you're genuinely improving. Show self-awareness, not perfection.*	
Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team. *Use your Story Mining answers. What was your specific role? What did the team accomplish?*	
Tell me about a time you handled a difficult situation. *Set the scene, say what YOU did, share the result. Pull from your Story Mining worksheet.*	
Why should we hire you? *Connect your strengths directly to what the job needs. Be confident. This is your moment.*	
Do you have any questions for us? *Always have 1–2 questions ready. See the list in Part 5.*	

PART 6

Building Your Network Early

The Relationships You Build Now Will Open Doors Later

Networking sounds like something adults do at business conferences. But the concept is simple: people help people they know and trust. The relationships you build in high school (with teachers, coaches, mentors, employers, and community members) are the foundation of your professional network.

Most people don't think about this until they need a job. Starting early is a real advantage.

Who Is Already in Your Network

- Teachers and professors: especially ones whose subject relates to your career interests.
- Coaches and activity advisors: they've seen you work under pressure and handle responsibility.
- Employers and supervisors: anyone who has seen you show up and do the work.
- Community and religious leaders: people who know your character outside of school.
- Parents' colleagues and friends: don't underestimate this; warm introductions are powerful.

How to Maintain a Relationship

- Say thank you, genuinely and specifically. If someone helps you, acknowledge it.
- Stay in touch: a brief update ('I got the job! Thank you for the reference') goes a long way.
- Be reliable: if you say you'll do something, do it. Your reputation starts here.
- Connect on LinkedIn: you can create a LinkedIn profile at 16. Start building it now.

References

A reference is someone who will speak positively about you to a potential employer. You'll typically need 2–3 references. Always ask someone before listing them. Never surprise a reference.

Good references for high school students: teachers, coaches, club advisors, religious leaders, previous employers, volunteer coordinators, or community members who know you well.

> *Important: Do not list family members as professional references.*

Reference Tracker			
Name	Relationship to you	Contact info	What they can speak to

LinkedIn: Start Now

LinkedIn is the professional social network where employers, recruiters, and professionals connect. You can create a profile at age 16. You don't need much to start.

- Use a professional photo: clear, well-lit, appropriate attire. A school photo works fine.
- Write a short summary: who you are, what you're interested in, what you're looking for.
- Connect with teachers, coaches, and employers who are on the platform.
- Follow companies and industries you're interested in: it helps you learn and stay informed.

PART 7

Exploring Career Paths Through Conversations

How to Discover What You Want to Do

One of the best ways to figure out what career path is right for you is to talk to people who are already doing it. This is called an informational conversation, and it is one of the most underused tools available to high school students.

An informational conversation is not a job interview. You are not asking for a job. You are asking someone to share their experience with you: what they do, how they got there, and what they wish they'd known. Most adults are happy to help a student who is genuinely curious.

You don't need to know what you want to do before having these conversations. That's exactly why you're having them.

Who to Talk To

- Teachers and school counselors: they've worked with hundreds of students and know many professionals in different fields.
- Family members and family friends: the most accessible starting point. Ask your parents, aunts, uncles, or neighbors what they do and if you can ask them a few questions.
- Community members: coaches, religious leaders, business owners in your neighborhood.
- Alumni from your school: many high schools have alumni networks; your counselor can help connect you.
- Professionals you admire: if there's a career you're genuinely curious about, it's okay to reach out to someone doing it. Most people will say yes if you ask politely and keep it simple.

How to Ask for a Conversation

Keep your ask short. Here's a simple template you can use in person, by email, or by text:

> *'Hi [Name], I'm a [grade] student at [School] and I'm exploring different career paths. I know you work in [field/job] and I'd love to hear more about what you do. Would you be open to a short conversation, even 15–20 minutes? I'd really appreciate it.'*

What to Ask

- How did you get into this field? Did you always know this is what you wanted to do?
- What does a typical day or week look like for you?
- What do you enjoy most about your work?
- What's the hardest part of your job?
- What kind of education or experience do people usually need to do what you do?
- If you were a high school student today, what would you do to explore this field?
- Is there anyone else you think I should talk to?

What to Do After the Conversation

- Send a thank-you message within 24 hours: a text, email, or handwritten note. Be specific about what you learned.
- Write down what you learned while it's fresh: what interested you, what surprised you, what made you more or less curious about the field.
- If they offered to connect you with someone else, follow up on it within a week.

Conversation Tracker

Person & their job	How you know them	Date of conversation	Key things you learned / what to follow up on

After a few conversations, ask yourself: which ones felt energizing? Which fields made you want to know more? That reaction is data. Follow it.

Final Reminders

- Start before you're ready. A resume that's 90% done and submitted beats a perfect one that never gets sent.
- Every adult you meet professionally is a potential reference, mentor, or connection. Treat people accordingly.
- Rejection is part of the process. Everyone gets turned down. Apply to the next place.
- The habits you build now (showing up on time, following through, communicating professionally) will follow you through your entire career.
- Ask for feedback. If you don't get a job, it's okay to ask what you could do better next time. Most people will respect that.