

Going Alt-Ac: How to Begin

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By

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Maybe you have become disenchanted with academia and/or the academic job search, or you have recently discovered the numerous possibilities outside of the university. Perhaps you have known from the beginning that a different path calls to you, or maybe you're just curious. Whatever the case may be, read on for tips and suggestions for how to begin your [Alt-Ac](#) job search and determine the skills you need to acquire to land the job you want. Alt-Ac(Alternative-Academic) refers to careers that may be in or outside of academia that present opportunities for PhDs besides tenure-track professorships.

(1) To begin with, you need to do some **soul searching**:

- What skills do you currently possess?
- What interests you?
- What motivates you?

(As a side note, I am not promoting the “Do What You Love” ideal, recently criticized in [Miya Tokumitsu's](#) excellent post, [“In the Name of Love.”](#) I am merely suggesting that your interests may provide clues about career paths you might consider outside of academia.)

(2) Carefully **consider your constraints**.

- Do you need to be mindful of the [location](#) and schools for your children?
- What income range is acceptable?
- Is there a particular geographic region you want to be in?
- Is your [partner looking for a job](#) or does s/he have a position s/he would like to remain in?
- What sort of lifestyle are you looking for—a cozy small town with great hiking, a cosmopolitan city, family-friendly suburban living, or something in between?
- How much of a commute is acceptable?
- Would you like to drive your own car or use public transportation?
- What housing costs fit in your budget?
- How many hours per week are you willing to work?
- Are you willing to travel?

Keep all of these things in mind as you begin your search.

(3) You need to build **awareness**: What jobs exist?

Not sure where to start? **Explore**:

- [LinkedIn](#) - Create a profile, include your work history, education, publications, skills, and links to any digital work you've created or other public profiles. Build your network through contacts at your university, past jobs, friends in industries you find interesting. Then begin searching the job ads.
- [Versatile PhD](#) - You can also create a profile on this site. See if your university or professional organization is a member to get free access to premium content.
- Your field's professional organizations, such as the [Modern Language Association](#) or [American Anthropological Association](#). Unfortunately, the American Historical Association does not offer career resources for alternatives to tenure-track positions. It looks like it's time for the AHA to catch up! Let us know what career resources your field offers graduate students in the comments section below.
- [10 Career Websites Every PhD Student Should Visit](#): Provides links to a number of helpful resources, including sites where PhDs share their own Alt-Ac career paths. These stories are both encouraging and provide great ideas for jobs you may never have known about or considered!
- The U.S. and Canadian Governments list thousands of jobs each year from diverse fields. Check out what is currently available for U.S. and Canadian government positions at [USAjobs.gov](#) and [jobs.gc.ca](#), respectively.

Other resources to learn about and prepare for the Alt-Ac job market:

["The Alt-Ac Track"](#) by Brenda Bethman and C. Shaun Longstreet

["How to do the Search"](#) by Brenda Bethman and C. Shaun Longstreet

[#alt-academy](#), a MediaCommons Project

David Drysdale's [List of Alt-Ac Resources](#)

For more information on what types of jobs exist, check out [Versatile PhD's Career Finder](#) to get started.

You can choose between Humanities/Social Sciences or STEM fields and then select a broad category from the dropdown menu. There you will find background information about the career path, what types of specializations are preferred, how to get started in the field, advancement options, the personality type best suited for it, and what you need to do to prepare for such a career.

(4) **Examine the job announcements.**

Check out sites like [Higher Education Recruitment Consortium](#), [Academic Keys](#), [LinkedIn Jobs](#), or [Career Builder](#) and narrow it down by geographic location or industry. Search and sign up for listservs in your field that periodically send out job announcements. What stands out as you read through the job descriptions? What sounds exciting? Begin to create a **list of keywords** you can use for your job search. For example, here are a few of mine: Communications, Curriculum, Digital, History, Humanities, Instructional Design, Media.

(5) Don't neglect the importance of **talking to people** in the fields you're interested in.

Ask your former employers, adviser, or committee members (if you're comfortable and feel supported in your Alt-Ac pursuit) about what types of jobs you could apply for with your talents and abilities. **Arrange informational interviews** with professionals to find out more information about the job itself, how they entered the field, and what skills you will need to demonstrate to land a similar position. (Stay tuned for Wednesday's post on informational interviews!)

(6) [Transform your CV](#) into a 1-2 page resume for different categories of positions. For instance, I have resumes for digital media/marketing, instructional design, digital humanities, and education. Be sure to highlight the skills you have developed. Not sure what to focus on? Take notes as you read through job ads for similar positions. What words keep coming up? Is project management experience important? Look up the [field's buzzwords](#) and use them to ensure you catch the attention of an automated system or HR person. (Check out Bethman and Longstreet's article, too: "[Sharing Success in New Ways](#)".)

(7) When is the best time to apply? If you're in the last year or two of your program... **Now**. Continue to work on the dissertation, but don't neglect the job search. It is far more time-consuming and a much lengthier process than we often anticipate. Keep applying until you know you have a job and the stability that will come with it. If you're still in the first few years of your program, this is the perfect time to begin honing the skills you will need to land a job outside of academia. (Follow the above steps to find out what you need to work on.)

(8) Finally, **dare greatly**. I won't tell you not to be afraid, but I will encourage you to put yourself out there even if you're terrified. You will probably feel that some of the positions you apply for are a bit of a stretch. You may wonder, as I have, if you're qualified enough. This is when you will have to be bold and apply anyway. **You cannot get a job you don't apply for.**

What questions do you have about the Alt-Ac job search? Ask them in the comments section below or via Twitter (@GradHacker, #AltAc), and watch for responses in forthcoming posts and podcasts.

source: <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/gradhacker/going-alt-ac-how-begin>