

### Welcome back!

You may have been out of paid work for a few months, or even a few years, and want to go back to work, and you are not sure what to expect or how to prepare yourself. The industry you work in may have gone through some changes, which means the job and skills required for this type of work may have changed.

You may have been away from work for any number of reasons. Here are some of the more common ones:

- You took the time to raise a family
- You were ill or recovering from an injury
- You were caring for someone aged or disabled
- You were studying
- You took early retirement
- You spent some time overseas



Whatever your reasons were, now it is time to work out how you can go about moving back into the workforce with the least amount of stress.

### First steps

After this time off, you may have lost some confidence about how you will cope with a new job and the workplace. Here are some positive ideas that address common concerns about returning to work:

#### *'I'm not sure if I have the work skills I need?'*

Even though you have not been doing paid work, you have still been using all sorts of skills that are relevant to work, like budgeting and organising. You would also have developed skills in your time away that you did not have last time you were in a job. These may be skills gained through raising your family, caring for others, community and volunteer work or hobbies.

*Write down some of the things activities you have been doing and think the skills you have been using and how these can be used in the workplace. These are called transferrable skills. E.g. Being organised/ time management skills, communication skills etc.....*

| Activity | Skills developed |
|----------|------------------|
|          |                  |
|          |                  |
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|          |                  |
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## Transition to Work after a long absence

You will already have some skills to offer an employer. Job-specific skills are the ones needed to complete an activity like cleaning, computer programming or record keeping. These are also called 'hard' skills.

Self-management skills are needed in almost all jobs. These 'soft' skills include being punctual, reliable, flexible, and able to work in a team or on your own.

*What work can you do with your current skills? Many people returning to work have the skills they need to get the job they are looking for, but they need to repackage these skills to make them marketable to employers.*

| Previous Experience | Existing Skills | Type of work I can already do |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
|                     |                 |                               |
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### ***'My skills may be out of date.'***

Consider retraining or upgrading your skills. A key skill for many jobs is using computers. If you have one at home, you can train yourself in the use of some of the more common software packages. You could ask a family member or friend to show you or you could think about taking classes – community centres often run computer courses for beginners.

*Write down the skills that you think you will need to update, these should be in line with the type of career you have been exploring and what will be required in this type of job/ work role.*

### **Name of Occupation:**

| Qualifications I need to update..... |
|--------------------------------------|
|                                      |
|                                      |
|                                      |
|                                      |
|                                      |



## Transition to Work after a long absence

Use [Job Outlook](#) to further explore possible skills you will need. Another good way to look at current requirements for jobs is to look at current advertised positions and see what qualifications, skills, and abilities they are looking for. You can also get an idea of new jobs that use your skills by entering 5 previous jobs in the [Skills Match](#) tool.

### Skills and abilities I need to update.....

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Explore courses for the gap in skills that you need to develop. [Victorian Skills Gateway](#), [Job Outlook](#), [MyFuture](#), [VTAC](#), [The Good Universities Guide](#), [Australian Apprenticeships Pathways](#), [Learn Locals](#), [Community Houses or Neighbourhood houses](#), your local council often run short courses as well.

### Courses I could take to upgrade my skills.....

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### ***'I'm worried about my age.'***

Make the most out of the experience you have, the work ethic you have developed and your reliability. Know how to market yourself to prospective employers, highlighting why they should employ you. Decisions are not only based on factors such as age. Ultimately, companies focus on getting the right person for the job, regardless of age.

### Why do you think you are the right person for the job? What can you offer, what makes you stand out?

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### *'I have family commitments.'*

Planning, cooperation, and support from others is important when returning to work. Making sure you allow plenty of time to organise all the things you need to put into place to cover the time you were at home. Such as Childcare, transport to and from Kinder, school, or high school. This could mean that you need to consider what hours of work will be suitable for you and your family or investigate before and after school care options.

*Find a suitable childcare centre that is close to your work and the school your children attend.*

### Possible childcare centres near me I can visit

| Name of Childcare Centre | Phone Number | Address |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------|
|                          |              |         |
|                          |              |         |
|                          |              |         |

*Find suitable employment by considering the hours of work that you will be able to do.*

| Hours I can work       | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday | Total hrs per week |
|------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|--------------------|
| Morning                |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |
| Afternoon              |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |
| Night                  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |
| Total Hours I can work |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |

*Ask friends, family, and other allies you have for support. Like taking it in turns to do pickups from school or sporting activities....*

### Who can help you with some of the activities e.g.

| Activity               | Day           | Time         | Who could help? |
|------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| <i>e.g. Basketball</i> | <i>Monday</i> | <i>4-5pm</i> | <i>Sister</i>   |
|                        |               |              |                 |
|                        |               |              |                 |
|                        |               |              |                 |



### *'I'm still recovering from my illness and would like to return to work'*

If you are returning to work after a severe or long-term illness, do it gradually. Your illness may have made it impossible for you to continue in your former occupation. You may need to set new goals, and these may be quite modest when you first start back at work. As your health and confidence improve, you can revise or build on them.

*Think about the hours you will be able to manage and increase these gradually as you feel comfortable to do so.*

| Hours I can work       | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday | Total hrs per week |
|------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|--------------------|
| Morning                |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |
| Afternoon              |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |
| Night                  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |
| Total Hours I can work |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |                    |

*Talk to your employer and see how they can support your return to work.*

| What sort of support would you like your employer to provide? |
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*Ask friends, family, and other allies you have for support during your transition time.*

| What sort of support would you like your friends and family to provide? | Name of person who can help |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Cleaning  |                             |
| Dropping Children off   |                             |
|   |                             |
|   |                             |
|   |                             |



### Decide what you want

What are you looking for in a job? Think about whether you want:

- full-time or part-time work
- paid employment or voluntary work
- work in a familiar field or in a new area
- retraining

Do you have a Career plan? Are you willing to work towards your goal, or do you need to revise it to make it more realistic and achievable? Are you able to go for your ultimate job now or should you start off with something easier, just to build confidence and get familiar with working life again?

### Develop a career action plan

When you have identified the occupation or job you are aiming for:

- Compare what you have got to offer an employer with what the employer needs
- Identify any gaps in your skills, knowledge and experience that might be barriers to getting a job
- Work out ways to overcome them

Finding out more about your skills and interests will help you identify what work you would like to do. Having a [career action plan](#) will help you to reach your goals.

To plan a career, you need to [know who you are. You need to assess your own values, interests, skills, strengths, weaknesses, achievements, abilities, and goals.](#)

Work out short-term, medium-term, and long-term career goals

### You can start to set your career goals once you know:

- your values, interests, skills, strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and goals
- the career that interests you
- what is happening in the current world of work?

Search our [career resources](#) to help you find out more about what is important to you now.

Setting your short-term, medium-term, and long-term career goals is an important step towards getting the job and future you want. Planning can make the difference between getting your dream job and ending up in a job you do not like.

Set realistic goals to improve your chances of getting where you want to be. Set target dates too, so that you have got something to look forward to and work towards. Aim to complete short-term goals within about a year, medium-term goals within three years and long-term goals within five years.

When setting your goals, note down everything you will need to do to achieve each goal. Your short-term goals will include jobs that you can do now with the skills you have.



### What career field are you interested in?

You need to research and understand the current world of work to find out what opportunities are available and what you must do to find the job you want.

#### To research a new career field:

- read everything you can find about it
- attend relevant seminars and lectures
- enrol in relevant courses
- talk to people in that field and use their inside knowledge as a resource
- find some way to get on-the-job experience, even if it is unpaid at first
- contact industry associations
- Join LinkedIn groups
- Attend events or conferences

### Survival, entry-level, transitional or dream job?

This is a very personal judgement – one person's survival job may be another's dream. But here is a rough guide to the definitions:

**Survival jobs:** May not be in the career field you are interested in, but they are useful for immediate short-term employment. They earn you money while you study, train or look for a better job. Aim to move away from a survival job quickly, towards a job that interests and challenges you – your dream job.

**Entry-level jobs:** allow you to begin a career path within your career field. The level you enter at depends on your experience and education, and on the state of the industry and the local job market. All industries offer entry-level positions.

**Transitional jobs:** move you from an entry-level job towards your dream job. These take you a step further in your field of interest and teach you the skills you need for your dream job. These jobs can be a steppingstone helping you get to where you want to go.

**Dream jobs:** give you a sense of fulfilment. They utilise your gifts and talents rather than your skills, and they match your passions and values. When you know what your dream job is, you will have an idea what entry-level and transition jobs you should seek on your way to it.

### Barriers and how to overcome them

A barrier can be anything that you believe will stop you from reaching your planned goal. Something that is a barrier for someone else might not be one for you and vice versa.

Some of the biggest barriers to going back to work are:

- Thinking you look bad to a potential employer when you have spent time away from the workforce
- Worries you have about getting back into the workforce
- Feeling as if your skills are not up to date
- Negative self-talk
- Lack of confidence



Make sure your cover letter and resume highlight your skills and abilities well and provide good evidence relevant to the job you are applying for. In a job interview you need to have confidence in your answers.

Focus on:

- the skills and knowledge you can offer
- how quickly you can become productive in the workplace

It is hard to conduct the interview confidently if you're worried about all the barriers that you face. So decide how you'll overcome those things you might lack before you sit down to talk to a potential employer.

Sometimes this is not easy. It may be a good idea to get some help and advice from a trained professional like a career practitioner. They help people prepare themselves for the workforce.

An employer may worry that for whatever reason you cannot meet their needs. To address this barrier, consider the following questions:

- Can I do the job, do I have the skills and abilities they are looking for?
- Am I motivated to do the job?
- Do I present myself as being reliable?
- Do I fit the image and attitude the company is looking for?
- Am I eager to learn and extend my skills?

Again, if you present yourself confidently, the employer will have faith in your abilities. Prepare by having a short 'script' in mind to meet any doubts you think the employer might have.

### How do you explain the gaps in your resume?

Time away from the workforce can often mean that you have gaps in your resume. You need to show what you did during these times, particularly if they are very recent or ongoing.

Be brief and calm – do not apologise for your decision to take time off. Make a positive statement about what you did, or have been doing, in the time away. Then focus on why you are ready to go back to work.

Employers do not just want to know where you have been and what you have done – they want to know what you can do now.

Try putting together a functional resume instead of a chronological resume. ***A functional resume highlights your skills rather than showing continuous employment.*** Remember that life experience has value in the working world.

Also include volunteer activities on your resume. These always look good to an employer. [See the Resume Workbook](#) for more on writing resumes.

If you really feel that your skills are not up to the level the employer requires, more study or training can give you more options. Any kind of training is an investment in your future. Part-time study can





help you build up confidence and bring you into contact with other people who are changing themselves and their lives.

### Dealing with change

Talk to employed people you know, particularly people who have recently been job hunting, about their experiences.

Other changes might bother you – changes in yourself and possible changes in your way of life.

- You may lack self-confidence
- You might not like the idea of moving from being independent to having an employer give you instructions
- You might be nervous about having to work in a team
- You might wonder how you will cope with the change of pace after having so much time to yourself
- You might feel left behind by changes in technology
- The idea of changing what you do in your life or who you are might disturb you

### Getting help

Where can you get expert help in planning your return to work and making it happen? You might only need one person to talk things through with, or a whole team of people to cheer you on.

Use a professional counsellor, career practitioner, mentor, colleague, family member, friend, or any combination of these. Anyone who can give you objective opinions and help you feel cheerful about job hunting is useful to you.

### How long does it take to find a job?

It might take six months to a year to find the right job for you. If you have decided to get back into the workforce, do not sit about waiting for that job – go out and meet it. Volunteering or doing work experience in the area you are interested in can help you to get the skills you need to get the job. This way you can try out a possible career as well as meeting new people who might know about available work.

Temporary work is a good option for people wanting to earn money straight away without jumping into a career that they have not explored fully.

Consider all your work options

### Permanent work

If you have had a short career break, or you are confident about your return to work, you may wish to go straight into a permanent job.



### Temporary work

If you are not sure about what work or hours you are looking for, temporary work is ideal. It is completely flexible; you choose the days and hours you want to work and the jobs you want to take. Working as often or as little as you like may solve child care problems.

Temporary work can also provide a great training ground. Here are some other benefits.

- You can try out the work before you make your final decision about whether this is an area you want to work in
- No long-term commitment is required of you
- You experience, from the inside, companies that you might not have considered working for, but which have real career possibilities for you
- You get to work for businesses of all sizes and see which you prefer
- You may have the chance to try working for non-profit organisations

### Volunteer work

Volunteer work can allow you to strengthen your skills and learn new ones without the pressure of working in a paid job. It also gives you a chance to network, meet new people and find out a work area of interest to you.

For information about volunteering, contact your local volunteer centre:

[Volunteering Victoria](#)

### Support services

[Centrelink services](#) provide a good place to start when researching your return to work. It provides links to publications and services of all kinds that are useful to job seekers.

### Checklist

- Identify what work you are looking for. What would you love to do?
- Be clear about the skills you can offer now, and about those you want to develop further.
- Make sure your resume is up-to-date, clearly laid out, concise and tailored to the work you are looking for. Browse sample resumes on the internet. Ask a career practitioner or a friend who knows about job applications to review it.
- Do not overlook contract opportunities, no matter how short-term they are. Many turn into long-term or permanent positions.
- Attitude is everything. You may need to take an entry-level position or do volunteer work to get the experience you need.
- Tell everyone you know that you are looking for work. Tell them what you can do and the kind of job you want. People cannot help you if they do not know what skills you can offer.
- Most positions require basic information technology (IT) skills. Think about training or upgrading your skills in this area.