

# Top mistakes made by international students in the job search process



Living in the US as an international student comes with its share of challenges. Searching for and landing a job can be one of the most trying experiences. Even the most qualified international students lose employment opportunities because of mistakes that can easily be avoided.

Here are the top common mistakes international students make and practical tips on how to avoid them.



## 1. Not utilizing Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT allows international students to build their resume through internships and projects directly related to their academic coursework. Gaining part-time experience through CPT can be a major advantage when applying for full-time roles, as employers often look for relevant experience on your resume.



### Interstride tip!

Consider utilizing your CPT program for internships even if they are short-term and unpaid.

## 2. Not hitting the deadline for Optional Practical Training (OPT) application

Many students either completely forget to apply or miss the deadline to submit their OPT application. Not submitting the OPT application on time can be extremely costly. You will not have the required authorization to work in the US after graduation.



### Interstride tip!

An easy way to avoid this mishap is to set a reminder on your calendar to contact the ISSS office 60–90 days before graduation.

## 3. Not having a backup employment option in place

The H-1B visa is highly competitive, and because it's a lottery-based process, it's never a guaranteed option for international students. That's why having a backup employment plan is essential. Continue exploring alternative pathways and strengthen your professional network—whether in your home country or a third country where you're authorized to work.



#### **Interstride tip!**

Use the cap-exempt filter in the [Interstride Career Portal](#) to find roles that don't require the H-1B lottery.

Plus, don't miss out on our other resources including immigration webinars that break down alternative visa options and career sessions with tips for landing jobs in the US and globally.

## **4. Not utilizing the campus career services resources and alumni connections efficiently**

The career services office should be the first place to start your career exploration. They can offer job search support, strategic guidance, mock interviews, alumni connections, and valuable insights into industries and job trends. Many employers recruit directly through on-campus interviews, and career advisors are constantly working to bring new opportunities to students.



#### **Interstride tip!**

Career services offices have partnered with Interstride to give you access to jobs, visa insights, employer data, a built-in international student community, and resources—all tailored to support international students in their career journey.

## **5. Not investing time to polish your LinkedIn profile**

Most employers check a candidate's LinkedIn profile before scheduling an interview or screening call. A missing or unpolished profile can hurt your chances of moving forward—make sure yours is clean, professional, and up to date.



#### **Interstride tip!**

The [Interstride Career Portal](#) has tailored resources to help you build a strong, professional profile. Simply head to the Resources section to find career advice specifically for international students—including tips on creating an effective LinkedIn profile.



## 6. Not looking beyond on-campus job boards

Campus job boards are a great starting point for international students seeking job opportunities. However, relying only on open listings can lead to a passive search.

Job searching isn't a numbers game. Sending out hundreds of resumes rarely leads to meaningful results. Instead, focus on making connections: reach out to alumni, connect with professionals at companies you're interested in, and do your research. Active networking can open doors that job boards alone can't.



### Interstride tip!

Use the **Visa Insights** feature on the Interstride Career Portal to identify companies that have a history of **sponsoring international candidates**.

In the **Jobs section**, apply the H-1B and cap-exempt filters to find roles from employers most likely to sponsor international students.

## 7. Not networking

As many as 85% of jobs are filled through networking—not job boards. That's why building and maintaining a strong network is essential for international students. Use LinkedIn, alumni groups, and international student associations to start making meaningful connections in your field.



### Interstride tip!

Use the Network tool on Interstride to connect with international alumni who have been through the student journey themselves. They can offer valuable insights on career paths, job searches, and immigration experiences.



## 8. Not pursuing internships and prior work experience

One thing that impresses employers most is prior work experience. Previous industry experience or functional expertise can make a candidate shine among a group of applicants. This can come from past employment, internships, co-ops, summer jobs, academic projects, or other professional experiences.

Without internship or work experience, international students are at a considerable disadvantage since employers are already hesitant about sponsoring entry level international candidates.



### Interstride tip!

International work experience is just as valuable as experience gained in the US. If you've worked in your home country or abroad, be sure to include that relevant experience on your resume.

If you'd like to expand your internship or job search outside the US, check out [\*\*Interstride's global job search portal\*\*](#) to find more opportunities around the world.

## 9. Not preparing for the interview

Lack of preparation and overconfidence in interviewing abilities are common trends among international students. This often shows up as unpolished resumes and cover letters, failure to clearly demonstrate value to employers during interviews, and a limited understanding of job requirements.

To avoid these pitfalls, students should take full advantage of career center resources, learn best practices, and schedule mock interviews to improve their confidence and readiness.



### Interstride tip!

Check out the interview prep and career advice resources in the Interstride portal to sharpen your skills. You can also connect with other students in the built-in international student community to practice mock interviews or exchange advice.



## 10. Not communicating effectively

From resume reviews to in-person interviews, communication skills are evaluated at every stage of the hiring process. Strengthening your English language skills can significantly improve your chances of finding employment in the US. Clear, confident communication—especially at networking events and career fairs—can open important doors.



### **Interstride tip!**

Practice makes progress. Reach out to your career center, alumni network, peer groups, or mentor associations to practice your English speaking skills and set up mock interviews.

## 11. Not understanding company values and culture

“Lack of culture fit” is one of the top reasons employers cite for not hiring international students. Before your interview, research the company’s values and culture, review their mission and vision, follow them on social media, and connect with current employees if you can.

You can also show culture fit by highlighting past experience working in the U.S. or with American companies.



### **Interstride tip!**

Use your school’s alumni network or LinkedIn to find and connect with alumni currently at the company. Request an informational interview to ask about their experience. These conversations not only give you insight into company culture but also help you build meaningful connections.

## 12. Not following up

Following up after an interview—whether formal or informational—reinforces your interest and professionalism. Many international students skip this step, which can be a missed opportunity. A thoughtful follow-up email shows appreciation, leaves a positive impression, and helps keep the conversation going.



### Interstride tip!

In the **Resources** section, there are videos and articles on how to follow up after your networking events, meetings, and interviews.

## 13. Not negotiating your job offer

Before you accept a job offer, remember that you can negotiate—especially when it comes to salary, contract terms, or visa sponsorship. Some employers may assume international students won't negotiate due to time-sensitive visa concerns or limited options.

If you're considering negotiation, approach it professionally and strategically. Start by consulting your career services office to understand market trends for similar roles.



### Interstride tip!

In the **Tools** section, there is a checklist on **Negotiations**. It lists all the elements that you could potentially negotiate after receiving an offer.

## Final word

Common mistakes can lead to serious setbacks—losing visa status, accepting a sub-par job, or feeling overwhelmed and stuck. But you don't have to navigate this alone.

Lean on your support system: international friends and family, your career services and international student services offices, Interstride, and other trusted tools.

Creating a plan to identify areas for growth—and discussing it with a career coach—can set you up for long-term success. Whether it's interview prep, experience, or language skills, there are resources available to help you strengthen every step of your journey.



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