



# Tech transition toolkit

We know you're no stranger to overcoming obstacles in pursuit of opportunities. You've trained hard and pushed yourself. You've worked with your teams to see each mission through. And you know that even during the most challenging and unexpected times, progress is possible.

That's why Microsoft Military Affairs created this tech transition toolkit: to help you take simple steps towards achieving your next goal and standing out – even virtually – in today's job market. Because no matter where you are in your journey, we know you already have what it takes to succeed.



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Stand out from the competition



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# Stand out from the competition

When you're looking for a new job, it's important to figure out how to distinguish yourself from other applicants. We talked to Microsoft Software and Systems Academy (MSSA) program site managers, who serve as program coordinators and career coaches for graduates, to uncover their best advice for landing a position in tech.

## Network, then network some more

You've probably heard a lot about the importance of networking – and that's because it's foundational to job searching. In the military, you would have been used to a commonly understood set of scales that describe your role and seniority (e.g., job spec and rank). Looking at your military background usually gives someone a fair idea of the work you've done and the level you've operated at. Outside the military, such comparisons are difficult and vary a lot between companies and industries. This is one big reason why it's important for you to network widely.

"Both of my post-military jobs came from someone telling me about the opening because they knew me and knew I was looking for a job. Networking works!" says Jennifer Allison. Keep in touch with people you've met in the military, and through MSSA, but also continue to make new connections. Yelena Shpigelman urges, "Network, network, network! Building and maintaining professional relationships is paramount."

For veterans, networking can initially be an awkward experience. Try to have a rough game plan when you're starting out. Think about the types of individuals, roles and industries you would like to connect with. Also be open and honest about why you are reaching out; you'll be surprised how much people want to help you if you are willing to listen and learn!

## Pinpoint your specific career goals

Determining precisely what you're looking for in a career is vital. A good starting point is to think about what you want. "Start thinking about things you like to do and conduct research to determine if there's a career in that field," says Maurice Radke. Once you've narrowed down your focus area, consider specifics. You may need to compromise in some areas if you can't be flexible in others. "Be honest with yourself and your wants, setting realistic expectations on what is available to you in your location of choice and the impact that has on salary," suggests Dina Janicki.

## Make a clear but flexible plan

"Stay open to all opportunities, even those that aren't a complete fit," says Jason Harvey. It can be a strategic move to just get a foot in the door in tech, rather than holding out for your ideal position. Douglas Woodruff has seen many candidates from the military get lost in the variety of resources available. He advises shaping a specific but adaptable road map.

If you're still in the military, approach transition services to help you narrow down the resources that specifically relate to your transition journey. It's also important to think about financial implications during transition. You'll need to consider your changing income and the adjustments you'll see to your expenses post-transition (e.g., changes to your housing and healthcare costs after leaving the military).



## Find the right mentor for you

"Acquire a mentor in the vocation or role you're seeking," advises Terry Henderson. "They will help you navigate the corporate terrain." Exploring LinkedIn connections is a streamlined way to find the optimal person to advise you at each step of your career shift to tech – and then through all the ins and outs of your long-term goals. A great mentor will share advice and support over the full course of your tech career, so it's worth taking the time to find a good relationship fit. Over time, you might also consider connecting with more than one mentor to support you in different priority areas as you grow your career.

## Value your own value

When you apply for jobs in technology, the way you present your military skills is important. Don't underestimate the full-spectrum merit you can bring to companies. "You are valuable, and you have done a lot; you just need to frame it for the corporate world," says Maureen Farmer. It's common for veterans to think they're underqualified for a position; but apply anyway. "It's not necessary to meet 100 per cent of the job description requirements," Terrence M. Brown reminds us. "Try to meet at least 60 per cent – and remember that includes soft skills, such as teamwork, collaboration and time management."

## Practice interviewing

"Practice, practice, practice your elevator pitch and 'tell me about yourself' response to share in interviews," advises Dayna Grimes. It's crucial to be able to convince employers – in a sentence or two – why they should hire you, based on all you'll bring to the organisation. Dry runs with a mentor or friend will make you more comfortable talking about these topics, and that preparation and confidence will stand out in interviews. "Just like anything else, the more you rehearse, the better you will sound," says Rudy Gonzalez.

When you rehearse behavioural questions, practise using response structures such as the STAR method, where you break down your answer into description of the situation, the task, your action, and the result.

The entire recruitment and interview process can be daunting when you start out. Take the time to understand the process so you have some idea of what to expect. Typically, companies will interview you more than once, with different interviewers focusing on different discussion points. Make sure you ask recruiters and interviewers to describe the interview process for each role you apply for and how you should prepare for the steps.

## Make a log

One of the biggest challenges coming from the military is quantifying what you've achieved personally. While most military members are conversant with measures of effectiveness and measures of performance relating to their missions, they don't log these things for themselves. If you keep a track of your own outputs, it provides a baseline or benchmark for your output. It's also a good self-accountability tool. Being able to say 'I produced X number of reports informing Y planning operations' is more tangible than generic statements about what you did but doesn't risk a breach of security or confidentiality!

While you're keeping a log, it's useful to identify which of the duties you enjoyed or didn't enjoy. This will help you clarify the kind of role you want to pursue in civilian life and can be useful when you reach out to your network. If you know which aspects of the duties you completed motivated or inspired you, this will help recruiters appraise if the jobs you're applying for will be a good fit.

## Understand you have time and use it effectively

Within the military, you have access to plenty of programs to help you upskill for when you decide to discharge. You should engage with these programs as early as possible and include them in your separation plan. You may have to serve a minimum notice period before you can be discharged. If you have a clear timeline to leave and make an unemotional plan to discharge (rather than 'rage quitting'), you'll be much better placed to leave positively at a time and place you choose.

Once you've made the final decision to discharge, communicate this with your chain of command. Use resources such as transition personnel to ensure you know what your allowances are and to flag early any key absences you've planned or are entitled to. After discharge, things may not work out exactly the way you planned. If you understand that you might face setbacks, you'll be more resilient. You're also more likely to get the right job for you and not feel compelled to take the first opportunity, which may not be the right fit.

## Keep it up

One of the most frequent pieces of advice we heard from site managers was to not lose momentum. "The job search is all about confidence and consistency of outreach, and confidence comes from consistent engagement with your targeted market," Dave Montore confirms. It can be dejecting to send out resumes and not hear back. But the key is to keep going. "Stay vigilant in searching for your next role," says TyRon Flynn. "Don't get discouraged; persistence overrides resistance."



# Leverage your LinkedIn network

Your LinkedIn network is a valuable resource to help you stay aware of opportunities and build connections while working to forge a new career path. In fact, according to LinkedIn, 70% of people hired at a new company had a connection at that company. Here are five tactical tips to make the most of your network (plus a bonus tip!).



## 1 Keep your profile up to date

A current profile ensures your connections know what you're up to now – and what you're interested in for the future – whenever they come looking. You can also use LinkedIn's badge tools to make it clear to anyone who visits your profile that you're #OpenToWork. The feature lets you easily share with your network – or even just with recruiters – that you're searching for work. Remember, networking isn't just about seeking out others, but is also equally about making sure you're ready when they find you.



## 2 Sign up for a free one-year LinkedIn Premium membership

You can expand your network powerfully with this enhanced version of the networking tool. The InMail feature lets you contact people you aren't already connected with and track everyone who's viewed your profile – both of which are valuable for job searching. The upgrade is available at no cost to all service members, veterans and military spouses.

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## Leverage the search feature

LinkedIn search is the easiest way to build your network on LinkedIn. With a Premium membership, you'll see more than the standard 100 search results, which means you can expand the number of potential touch points to aid your job search. The search tool also lets you filter by location, job type or degree of contact. You can even find and sync with people who are connected to your first-degree network. Simply input a search, and then use the filters at the top of the results page to explore all the options.

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## Reach out to old and new contacts

To build a comprehensive network you can tap whenever opportunity arises, be sure to connect with people you've worked with in previous roles. Don't be shy about reaching out, even to those you haven't had contact with recently. Just send a personalised message reminding them of your shared history, to put your connection request in context. You may ask, 'Should I also reach out to people I don't know?' The answer is yes! Just make sure you explain who you are and why you're looking to connect with them. And remember, the more you frame the reason for connection as something that could benefit them, the better the odds they'll accept the request.

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## Browse LinkedIn groups

Groups help boost your LinkedIn networking impact. In particular, the Veteran Mentor Network is an active community that provides how-to resources for people in your situation. Introduce yourself with a brief line about your background, and don't forget to state overtly that you're looking for a new position. To take it up another notch, mention that you're looking to build your network, and send connection requests (with a message explaining who you are) to anyone you'd like to talk to more. If you've enrolled in the MSSA program, be sure to contact program graduates who've found employment. Pro tip: once you join a group, interact within it regularly to remain memorable to active members.

***Bonus reminder: ask your network for help. A solid and active LinkedIn network (covering your military contacts and beyond) provides varied avenues of support when it comes to landing a referral or learning about applicable opportunities. Many veterans land jobs directly through such contacts. Don't forget, all your connections also have their own mutually beneficial reasons to connect with you – and are the perfect references to endorse you (and vice versa). It's a win-win.***

# Break into tech and thrive

Here's some pinpointed advice to help you forge ahead, from military vets like you who've already transitioned to civilian careers in tech.







**"Be your authentic self. Don't try to fit the mould of the job – find the job that moulds to you."**

**Lauren Capers**  
Azure Support Engineer  
at Microsoft



**"If you're new to coding, get as much practice as you can. Be prepared to put in the work and it will pay off in the end."**

**Jerry Wright**  
Advanced Systems  
Administration Specialist  
at General Dynamics  
Mission Systems



**"Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Put the same effort into job application number 50 that you put into application number one."**

**Tony Hernandez**  
Cloud Engineer at  
Anika Systems



**"It's ok to fail. Don't get caught up in everything you don't know – be brilliant at the basics and the rest will follow."**

**Rochelle Gorbea**  
SharePoint Customer  
Engineer at Microsoft

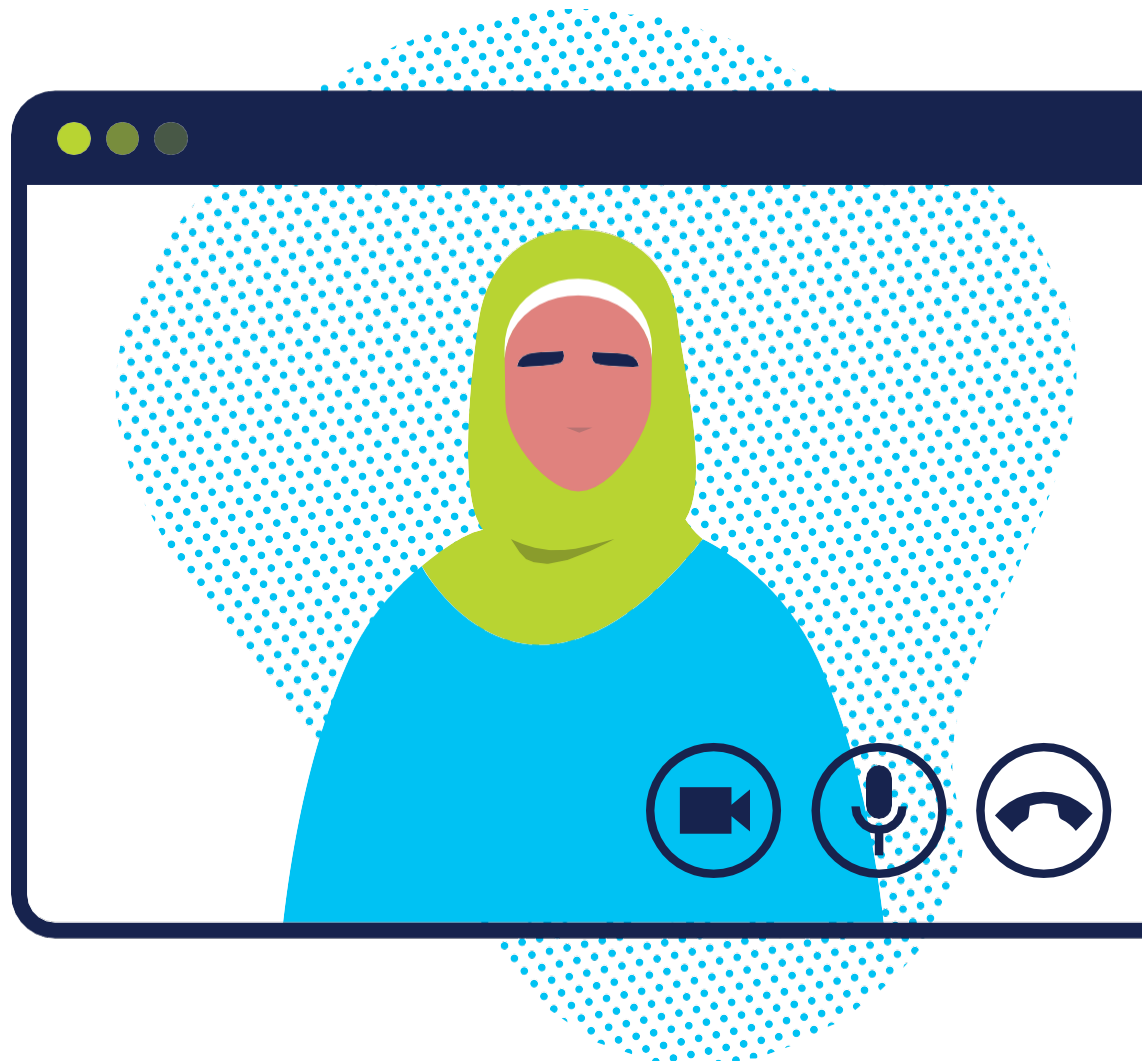


**"Don't undersell your military experience. That in itself is an invaluable asset to the tech industry."**

**James Koester**  
Help Desk Specialist at  
TEK Systems

# Optimise your virtual workspace

By taking a handful of achievable steps, you can create a workspace to help you succeed – and avoid some of the common mishaps that arise when learning, networking and job-hunting online. Tick off each item on the following list to ensure you're ready to bring your best, camera-ready, must-hire self.







## Set aside a dedicated location

Not everyone has the space for a separate home office. But a table in a bedroom or family room – combined with a set of noise-cancelling headphones – can do the trick. However large or small the space, make sure it's set up specifically for your work or learning experience – so you can focus without interruption when you need to.



## Get the right equipment

At minimum, you'll need a laptop for remote work. If you don't have a computer that's up to the task (with videoconferencing capabilities), it might be time to invest in a new one. The good news is that many computer companies provide discounts for serving personnel and veterans.



## Create a functional workspace

It's important to make your desk area functional and comfortable since you may spend hours at a time there. To boost ergonomics, consider adding an external monitor, keyboard and mouse to your computer setup – and upgrading to a chair that provides good back support. And since videoconferencing is the new normal, take account of your surroundings. If you don't have a neutral background, consider using the virtual backgrounds within videoconferencing apps.



## Practise open communication

We all know how difficult it can be to balance work and family responsibilities – especially when school is virtual and everyone's at home. It helps to keep open communication with other household members; let them know when you have a job interview or a call. And if you have children attending school online, consider setting a timer for them to focus on schoolwork (without impeding your job search work).

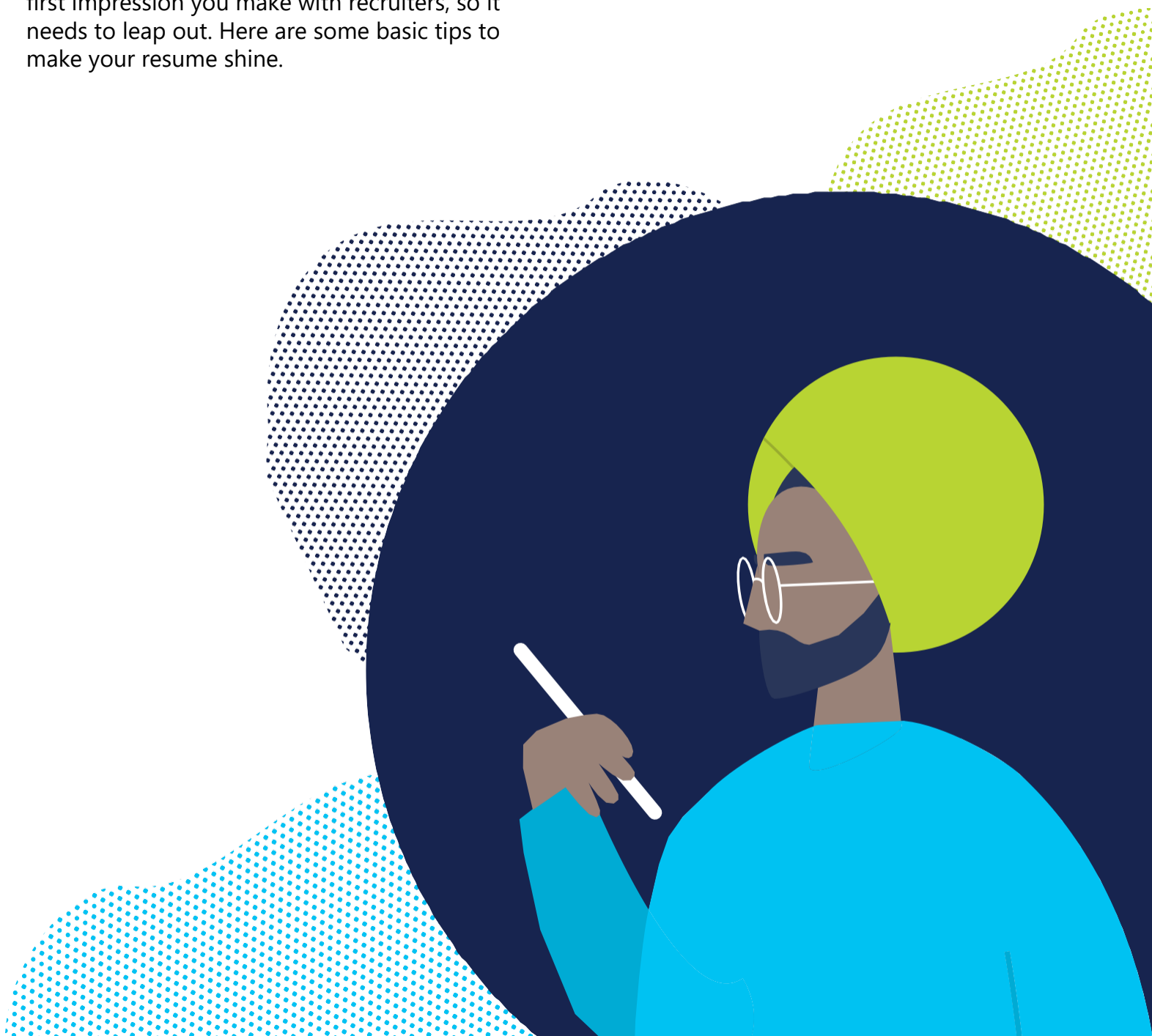


## Put yourself in a remote work or learning mindset

If you're waiting to start a training program, it may be useful to develop or hone your skills to get you into the mindset for virtual learning and work. The smoothest path is to set aside some time every week to make incremental progress. If you haven't applied for MSSA yet, you can use that time to complete and submit that paperwork. Be sure to visit the Microsoft Military Affairs Education portal for additional resources.

# Simple tips to build a resume that stands out

In most situations, your resume will be the first impression you make with recruiters, so it needs to leap out. Here are some basic tips to make your resume shine.



## > Tailor it

Applying to new positions is hard work – sometimes it can feel like a full-time job in itself. It's tempting to create a one-size-fits-all resume. But to really stand out from the crowd, you'll need to take the time to tailor the 'experience' section of your resume so it's relevant to each job you apply for.

## Be concise

If you're near the beginning or approaching the midpoint of your career, it's a good idea to limit your resume to a single page. Still, you should customise your cuts and focus points based on the job you're applying for. For further help prioritising what to spotlight, resume workshops through programs such as MSSA can help you customise the way you crystallise your expertise for each opportunity at hand.

## Use professional formatting

Microsoft Word has many resume templates you can take advantage of; it's a good idea to stick with one of these. It can be fun to play around with fonts, sizes, colours and margins – but unless you're a designer, employing a templated style will help you look more professional.

## List relevant information

It's crucial to include volunteer and other off-work activities to give hiring managers a sense of your values and personality. Take care to pinpoint your top hobbies and personal passion areas – to be sure your resume gives an evocative sense of yourself without feeling like a laundry list. And don't neglect to include pastimes you'd be proud to discuss in an interview, and that accrue to your desired career.

## Proofread repeatedly

You should proofread your resume many times for typos and errors. It's hard to catch your own mistakes, and the smallest typos can lead a hiring manager to dismiss your resume. A spelling checker is your friend, but if you can, have someone else look over it as well. In hiring – and the tech industry in general – grammar hygiene will take you further than you may think.



# Know your business lingo

Every profession has its own terminology. Chances are, as you build your new career, you'll come across words and phrases you're not familiar with or don't quite mean what you're used to from the military. We spoke with recent MSSA grads to find out commonly used job search and recruiting terms you may not be used to.



Term	Meaning	Veteran advice
Background check/reference check	A background check is a process where a company researches a candidate's background to validate their employment history and suitability to be employed in the organisation. In a reference check, an employer or hiring manager will contact your references to find out more about you and your previous employment.	Background and reference checks are normal and there is nothing to worry about. If an organisation has told you, it will conduct a reference check, make sure to let your referees know to expect a call, and give them plenty of pertinent information about the role you've applied for.
Base salary	Base salary broadly refers to an employee's salary before tax, including salary-sacrificed items.	Make sure the offer clearly articulates whether or not your base pay includes superannuation. Some organisations will list the base pay with superannuation included, which reduces your overall base pay.
Behavioural interview questions	Recruiters ask behavioural interview questions to help them predict your suitability for a role based on your behaviour in past jobs. Behavioural questions usually start out with 'Tell me about a time when ...' or 'Describe a situation when ...'.	The interviewer won't expect you to have all the answers or be perfect. Quite often they'll ask about times you had failures. These questions are designed to reveal how you think and how you deal with challenges, not to test you on what you know. Before going into an interview, think about scenarios you could talk about and try to use the STAR method when describing your examples.
Benefits	These are non-cash incentives that are separate from salary, such as parental leave, healthcare, superannuation contributions, company cars, flexible schedules, paid time off, wellness programs or gym memberships, children's daycare, student loan assistance and conference stipends.	During the interview process, ask the recruiter or HR point of contact about the organisation's benefits that will add value to their offer to you. The benefits will only be benefits if they're things you will use. Some organisations have relatively low base pay and high benefits because of the way their remuneration budgets are structured. Don't be shy to ask as many questions as you need to help make your decision.
Compensation/remuneration	This is everything the company provides to an employee over the course of a year, including basic salary, financial benefits such as incentive pay and bonuses and non-monetary benefits such as gym memberships.	Compensation may be broken down into components and may include additional leave, parking, removals, sign-on bonuses, and such. Check if the base pay includes superannuation or if superannuation is separate. Make sure you discuss the total compensation package during your salary negotiation and ask what additional benefits may be available on top of your base pay.
Cover letter	A cover letter is a letter you send along with your resume where you briefly explain how your job history is relevant to the role you're applying for and discuss why you'd like to work for that company in that position.	A cover letter can be a quick, easy-to-read way to state your value to a prospective employer. Check the job ad to see the company you're applying to requires a cover letter; many companies have moved away from using cover letters and prefer screening calls.
Cultural fit	Cultural fit refers to a candidate or employee's alignment with the organisational culture and processes in their beliefs, work expectations and values.	Research what each organisation's cultural values are and see if it's the kind of organisation you'd be interested in working for. If so, make sure to include examples of how you'd be a good culture fit throughout your resume or interview.
Discretionary bonus	If you're eligible for a bonus, this is a discretionary component of your remuneration. Your employer will determine, at its discretion, the amount of any bonus payment it makes to you.	Some companies pay bonuses, and some don't. During the interview process, it's good to ask about the company's policies on bonuses and whether it usually awards them. For example, if an organisation has a lower base pay than you're looking for, but it has good bonuses, your overall compensation may be better in that company.

Employer brand	Employer branding refers to all the factors that affect a company's reputation with job seekers. An internal employer brand consists of the ways employees perceive working at a company. An external employer brand is communicated to job seekers through word of mouth, the company's careers website, social media, and employment sites such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor.	It's worth researching a company you're looking to work for to understand if it's somewhere you'd like to work and if it has challenges you want to take on. Regardless of what work you do, there will always be problems to solve. It's best to think about which problems you enjoy solving and find a role and an employer that values your ability to do that.
Full-time equivalent (FTE)	A permanent employee within the company.	Organisations use this term to refer to the typical output or workload of a permanent employee working regular hours.
Fixed-term employment	Fixed-term employment is a temporary contract that either has a fixed date when the employment period ends or requires you to work until a fixed event or until you complete a specific task.	When you're in a fixed-term employment contract, you can request to extend the contract, or the employer may offer to extend it. Fixed-term employment has good and bad points, for example, they may not include sick leave and other benefits, but the pay rates are often higher than salaried roles. It's worthwhile clarifying and working out if that situation is right for your circumstances.
Grad level/entry level	An entry-level job usually requires no or little working experience in that field and is usually a junior position within a company or the first job you can hold after getting qualified for the role	If you're interested in a role but not sure if you qualify, apply anyway! The worst they can say is 'not this time' or 'we will keep you in mind for future positions. You will still get practice applying for jobs and undergoing interviews, which is a great thing!
Gross salary	Gross income for an individual – also known as gross pay when it's on a pay slip – is the individual's total pay from their employer before taxes or other deductions.	This will be detailed in your pay slip, similar to the pay slip you would have received in the military.
Individual contributor	A role that doesn't manage other staff.	An individual contributor may still need to manage tasks or guide people; it just means you won't have any people reporting directly to you. This is not necessarily a bad thing in the civilian world. For example, you can be a project manager and have no staff directly reporting to you but still manage a project and have to make sure people in other parts of the business are completing their tasks according to the project schedule.
Internal recruiter	An internal recruiter is an employee within a company whose job it is to fill positions from the company's existing workforce, either by promoting individuals or by conducting internal transfers.	Once you're in a company, you may come across an internal recruiter if you're looking to apply for another position within the company. Internal recruitments usually require fewer interviews than external ones since you would already have undergone screening and cultural fit interviews when you were hired in the first place.
Job board	A job board is an online service where individuals can look for jobs and employers can post advertisements to fill positions within their company.	Many veteran charities, government websites, company careers sites and job search companies (Seek, LinkedIn, Jora, etc.) have job boards. If you want to work in a specific company, it's easiest to go to its website (like Microsoft Careers!). Building a LinkedIn profile can help you use the LinkedIn job board to find jobs that might be right for you.
Non-disclosure agreement (NDA)	This is a contract that prevents individuals from sharing information about the business of another person or organisation.	Employers often use NDAs when discussing details around the salary, benefits or specifics of a role, particularly when there is a lot of commercial competition.



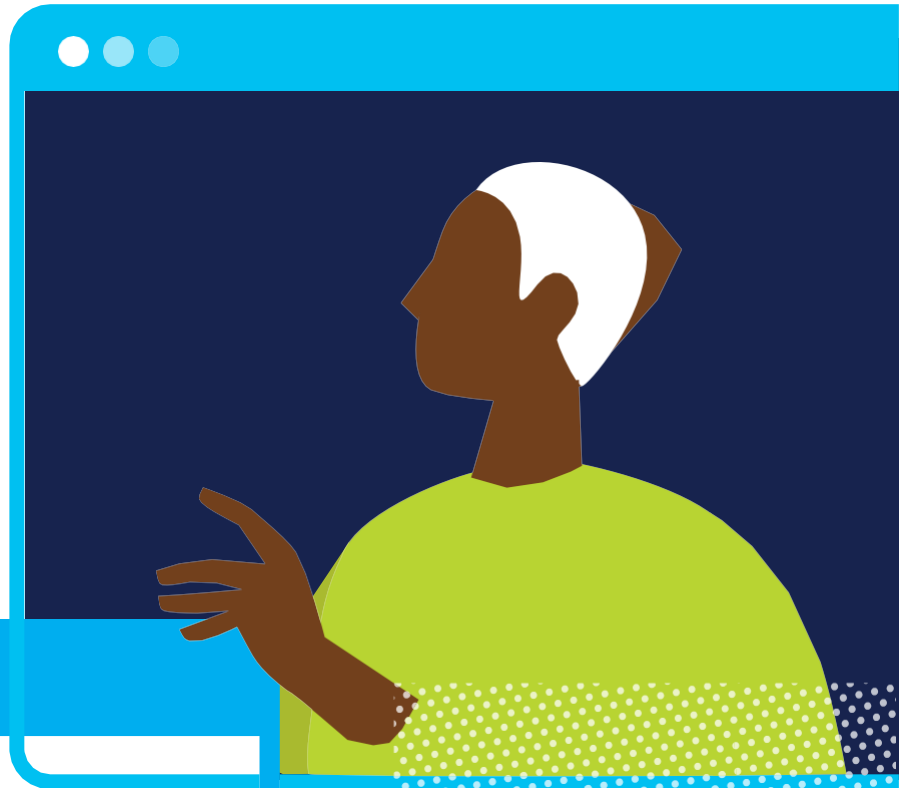
Offer	When a candidate is formally extended a job opportunity. This could be in an email or a letter, but it should always be in writing.	The time between finishing interviews, receiving an informal (verbal) offer and receiving a formal written offer in a contract can vary. Don't worry if it takes longer than a week; processes within a company can take up to a month. Stay in touch with the recruiter to track where things are at. And check the details of the offer when it comes through to make sure it includes all the items you discussed, such as relocation assistance or reservist/territorial leave.
Onboarding	Onboarding is the process of welcoming and integrating a new employee into the organisation. It includes collecting relevant paperwork and orienting the employee to the workplace. It usually includes training on the company's products and work processes with the goal of making the employee productive as quickly as possible.	This is very similar to induction training in a military unit. Many civilian onboarding programs are not as detailed as a military joining instruction or induction schedule. If you aren't sure what is expected of you, feel free to ask questions. In civilian jobs, you're encouraged to ask questions if things aren't clear; it's not a sign of weakness.
Phone screen/HR screen	This is a screening process that occurs in the early stages of the hiring process, usually after filtering out candidates based on their resumes. This is a short phone interview to deduce whether a candidate could be suitable for a position. An in-person interview is usually offered to the candidate at the end of a successful phone screening interview.	If you have a screening interview, don't worry. A lot of organisations use them to shortlist candidates or get a feel for you as a candidate before a longer and more formal interview. If you're getting a screening interview, chances are they're interested in you as a candidate for the role.
Probation period	A probation period is a set term during which the employer and the employee can terminate the employment relationship at short notice. It usually extends for the first three or six months of the contract. Probation gives employers and employees flexibility in deciding whether the role or workplace is a good fit.	Probation is a grace period during which you and your employer can work out if the workplace or role is a good fit for you both. If you aren't enjoying the role or the company during your probation, you can renegotiate the role or end your time with the employer at short notice. Similarly, the employer may decide you are not a good fit for the role. During the probation period, engage with your manager early if you're not clear on or not enjoying aspects of the role or if you'd like assistance to help settle you into the job. Civilian workplaces tend to encourage this open communication.
Stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder engagement is a systematic way of identifying, analysing, planning, and implementing actions designed to influence stakeholders. A stakeholder engagement strategy identifies the needs of key groups and ensures those business needs are met.	Stakeholder engagement is important to find out how your role and team add value within the broader business. Beyond that, it's a good way to make connections in your new career and learn about what other people do. Be curious and listen to other people's experiences.
Thought leadership	Thought leadership is the discipline of leading others to think deeper, see wider and embrace new changes and developments.	You may encounter thought leadership in job descriptions or as company values. Try to think about a time where you had to innovate to overcome a problem and influence others to work with you.



# Go further

Microsoft Military Affairs is here to give you the practical advice you need to begin a rewarding career in technology. If you're interested in learning more about how to maximise your job search efforts – and how to best apply your military skills to a career in tech – consider enrolling in MSSA. The program offers in-depth technical training in either cloud application development or server and cloud administration, plus soft skills guidance for standing out during your job hunt.

Learn more about Microsoft Software and Systems Academy at [aka.ms/MSSA](https://aka.ms/MSSA).



## Additional resources

### Microsoft Military Affairs

<https://military.microsoft.com>

### Veterans Connections

<https://veteransconnections.com.au/employment-support/>

### Veteran Mentor Network

[www.linkedin.com/company/veteran-mentor-network/](http://www.linkedin.com/company/veteran-mentor-network/)

### What is a personal elevator pitch?

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/perfect-your-elevator-pitch-3e583fb0-78d8-486e-910e-42e9b853a136>

### Why professional networking is so important

[www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-professional-networking-so-important](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-professional-networking-so-important)

### Interview Preparation Tips

<https://careers.microsoft.com/us/en/interviewtips>

### STAR Technique Job Interview Preparation

<https://templates.office.com/en-us/STAR-technique-job-interview-preparation-TM16412063>