

Finances 101: Setting Yourself Up for Success After Graduation

Congratulations! You're about to start your first full-time job and transition from being a college student to a working professional. This transition can come with a lot of changes and adjustments to one's lifestyle, daily routine, and budget.

One of the best things you can do for your long-term financial health is to set yourself up for success early on. The resources below will help you get started with budgeting, saving and understanding workplace benefits.

Budgeting

Learning how to budget is a key skill for managing your money and avoiding unnecessary debt. A budget gives you a framework for planning, controlling, and achieving your financial goals - big or small.

Resources to get started

- Basic budget worksheet: <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/finance/budget-worksheet>
- Canva free and customizable budget templates: <https://www.canva.com/templates/s/budget/>

Savings

Saving money is just as important as budgeting. It is generally recommended to have enough savings to cover 3-6 months of expenses (i.e. rent, groceries, bills, etc.) and while it may be difficult to think about setting aside that much money, with small steps, you can start building a healthy savings plan.

Tips and resources

- Contribute to your workplace retirement savings plans and if they don't offer one, set up a Roth IRA
 - [Why Roth IRAs are a no-brainer for 20-somethings \(CNBC\)](#)
- Follow the "Pay Yourself First" method—set aside savings as soon as you get paid.
 - [Pay Yourself First \(Business Insider\)](#)
- Open a High-Yield Savings Account to earn more interest.
 - [7 Reasons to Use a High-Yield Savings Account](#)

Workplace Benefits

When you start your new job, one of your first responsibilities will be completing new-hire paperwork and selecting your benefits. Understanding your options early will help you make the most of what's offered. Benefits are part of your total compensation and may include:

- Health insurance
- Paid time off (vacation, sick leave, holidays)
- Retirement savings plans (401k, 403b, pension)
- Additional perks (wellness stipends, tuition assistance, etc.)

Helpful resource

- [How to Understand and Choose Your Job Benefits \(The Muse\)](#)

Credit & Debt Management

Building good credit and managing debt responsibly are key parts of financial independence. A strong credit history will help you when renting an apartment, financing a car, or applying for a mortgage.

Tips and resources

- Pay your bills on time—payment history is the biggest factor in your credit score.
- Try to keep your credit card balances low and avoid carrying high-interest debt.
- If you have multiple debts, consider paying off the highest-interest one first.
- [How to read and understand your credit score \(Credit Karma\)](#)

Student Loans

If you have student loans, repayment will likely begin soon after graduation (usually after a grace period). Understanding your options early can help you avoid missed payments and manage your monthly budget.

Tips and resources

- Log in to Federal Student Aid to see your loan details and repayment options.
- Look into income-driven repayment plans if your monthly payments feel unmanageable.
- Set up automatic payments to avoid late fees (and sometimes get a small interest rate reduction).
- [Student Loan Repayment Guide \(studentaid.gov\)](#)