

# How to break into finance?

How to build knowledge & develop a strong profile to land your dream entry-level job in the field of finance!

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You want to start your career in finance after your studies in IB, asset management, private equity, etc. You probably know that the industry is clogged, highly competitive, and that it will be difficult to succeed in securing an offer, especially among the top-tier firms. If you are worried that your profile may not be good enough to secure the job offer you are seeking, then this article is for you. In this article, you will find the main options at your disposal, as a student, to increase your chances of breaking into the industry and get a sense of their relative value in the eyes of recruiters. With the goal of helping you build an impressive profile that will allow you to stand out and, hopefully, land you the entry-level job you are seeking.

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# 1) Professional Experience & Extra-Curricular Activity

## Professional Experience

Credited, off-cycle or summer internships are a great way to get practical knowledge of the job you're interested in. They also signal to employers on the market that you are serious and genuinely interested in that career path. It will get you closer to securing a job after you graduate, as you will have gained knowledge that other applicants who have not done an internship won't have. Plus, the company where you will do your internship may offer to convert your internship into a full-time job offer after graduation if you do well on the job.

Keep in mind while looking for an internship that it must be relevant to the job you want to apply to after you graduate, otherwise, your internship will not bring much added value.

You can search for an internship via the JobTeaser platform, the LinkedIn Jobs Tab (turn on post notifications), the career section on companies' websites, your network,...

Most internships last between 3 to 6 months, even though some last only a month. Do not hesitate to make the best out of the month of September to do an internship, as it is a fairly light month in terms of academic requirements, making it ideal to do a 1-month internship or a 3-month internship starting in July. Do not hesitate to start early while you are still on your bachelor's degree (BA2/BA3).

Bear in mind that it is very common to first have to secure a stepping stone internship to later on land the actual internship you are seeking. Therefore, it is important to start early.

## Extra-Curricular and Voluntary Activities

Extra-curricular activities are experiences where you hold a role within the university, e.g. being a member of a student club or a student representative. Voluntary activities entail occupying a role outside university, e.g. being involved in a student organization (off-campus) or any other non-profit organization.

This type of experience will help you demonstrate to future employers that you are proactive and willing to build knowledge beyond what you see in class. Plus, you will benefit from early exposure to experienced professionals through most of the roles you can occupy as a voluntary student (inside or outside the university). It is also a great opportunity to show that you can take on responsibilities. Ideally, you want to occupy a leadership position, e.g. president or head of a team, as these positions are the ones that require the largest commitment (more responsibilities and usually more time consuming). In addition to that, only a few students can access these positions. Therefore, being in a leadership role will simply look more impressive and will probably give you more to talk about in your CV, cover letter, or job interview. Even though having this large commitment leadership experience brings the most value, all experiences are good and can help you boost your CV to land a job or an internship.

The most relevant extra-curricular activities for the field of finance can probably be found within the [Solvay Finance Club](#) (for finance in general), [Solvay Digital Society](#) (for fintech), [Solvay Consulting Club](#), and [Solvay Business Game](#) (for financial consulting/advisory). All the Solvay clubs can be found here: <https://besolvay.be/clubs/>

The most relevant off-campus activities for the field of finance are likely to be found within [Capitant](#), [Academics for Companies \(AFC\)](#), [180 Degrees Consulting](#), ...

N.B. Attending club events can help networking, build knowledge, get insights from the industry, and provide experience to talk about when applying.

## 2) Certifications

### Internationally Recognized Certificates

Certifications such as [CFA](#) (or [CFM](#), [ACCA](#), ...) are among the most valuable certifications you can obtain, as they are globally recognized distinctions attesting that each person who has obtained one of these certifications has an in-depth knowledge of one or more specific areas of finance.

However, these certifications are very expensive to obtain in terms of time and monetary cost. For instance, the CFA will cost you anywhere from \$2,550 to \$4,800 to pass all three levels<sup>1</sup>, assuming you pass them all on the first attempt. Just passing the first level of the CFA can really set you apart during the application process. Keep in mind that, if you want, you can still pass those certifications after you join the job market and that most employers will pay for it.

### Industry-Specific Courses

These certifications, supplied by companies such as [Wall Street Prep](#), [Corporate Finance Institute](#), [Breaking Into Wall Street](#), etc., are valued and recognized by employers on the market. They offer courses on different areas of finance to help you build the necessary knowledge for a career in the area of finance you are interested in. These courses are much more affordable than certifications such as the CFA, but contrary to the CFA, they are only valuable for entry-level jobs. These certifications will help you, student/graduate, signal outstanding industry knowledge and interest in financial services. Having this type of certification will be very helpful in passing all stages of the selection process, especially if you don't have lots of relevant experience.

### Business School Certificate Courses

These certificate courses offered by target universities, such as [HBS](#), [Wharton](#), [LSE](#), etc., will help you build knowledge in the area you want to specialize in but will also allow you to add the name of a target school to your resume. The course prices can vary a lot, depending on the certification. For instance, you can find an [Advanced Spreadsheet Modeling Online Course](#) from Harvard Business School for \$90 and a course on [Alternative Investments](#) from the same university for \$1,750.

N.B. Big companies also offer certifications, such as the Bloomberg Market Concepts certification. This type of certification will also allow you to add the name of a well-known company to your CV and build valuable knowledge (e.g. how to use the Bloomberg Terminal).

### Other Courses

You can take courses on platforms such as [Coursera](#) to obtain certifications. There you will find courses on a wide variety of topics related to finance, some of them developed by professors from target universities but at very attractive prices. For instance, a course on Private Equity and Venture Capital from Bocconi University costs \$49.

<sup>1</sup> <https://ipassfinanceexams.com/cfa-exam-fees/>

### 3) Academic Curriculum/Background

#### What's the most relevant Solvay master for a career in finance?

The 2 most finance-related masters you can take at Solvay are the [Master in Business Engineering](#) and the [Master in Business Economics - Module Financial Markets and Services](#). They both offer a lot of courses on financial topics.

In the M-INGE, you can take between 15 and 95 ECTS in courses related to finance (15 ECTS mandatory courses, 0-20 ECTS elective courses, 0-5 ECTS field project, 0-25 ECTS exchange/internship, 0-20 ECTS thesis).

In the M-ECONB-F, you can take between 35 and 90 ECTS in courses related to finance (10 ECTS mandatory courses, 20 ECTS elective courses, 0-5 ECTS field project, 0-25 ECTS exchange/internship, 0-20 ECTS thesis).

Note that in both of these masters, you are eligible for the [QTEM](#). You are also eligible for the [double degree](#) with Politecnico di Milano for the Master in Business Engineering and the double degree with Universiteit Antwerpen for the Master in Business Economics.

#### Exchange Program (MA2)

While completing your master's, you will have the opportunity to enroll in the Solvay exchange program. This is an excellent opportunity to expand your knowledge of financial topics that may not be covered at Solvay.

Note that if you don't have any professional experience on your CV, the credited internship will probably add more value to your resume than the exchange program. But on the other hand, the exchange program is still valuable and is a unique experience that you cannot have afterward (unlike the professional experiences that you will end up having after you graduate anyway).

The full list of partner universities is available here: <https://sbsem.ulb.be/international/partners/list-of-partners> and for QTEM Students here: <https://sbsem.ulb.be/international/partners/qtem-master-network>

Keep in mind that each destination is not necessarily open to all masters.

#### Summer School

Another academic experience you can have is Summer School. It allows you to deepen your knowledge of a specific topic while also demonstrating that you have a strong interest in that topic because you are proactive in spending time and money to learn more about that specific area. It can also be the perfect opportunity to add the name of a target school to your resume. Finally, summer schools usually provide you with great networking opportunities that might help you a lot in the future.

#### 4) Build a good CV & Cover Letter

You can find below lots of very useful resources on how to write good resumes and cover letters that will make you stand out as a candidate.

*Wharton Resources on How to Write Your CV and Cover Letter:*

<https://students.mbacareers.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Resume-Tips-and-Resume-Book-Process-FINAL.pdf>

<https://careerservices.upenn.edu/blog/2021/11/23/how-to-write-a-cover-letter-10-tips-for-getting-noticed/>

<https://careerservices.upenn.edu/videos/mastering-the-cover-letter-in-10-steps/>

*Harvard Resumes & Cover Letter Guide:*

[https://cdn-careerservices.fas.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/161/2022/08/resume-and-letter\\_2022-1.pdf](https://cdn-careerservices.fas.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/161/2022/08/resume-and-letter_2022-1.pdf)

Do not forget to have an up-to-date LinkedIn profile.

Do not forget that it is crucial that you make an early application. Why? Because lots of companies recruit on a rolling basis. They review applications as they come, rather than waiting until the deadline. If you apply early, you are therefore more likely to be invited in for an interview/hirevue/assessment center sooner. Do not wait until the deadline to apply, as some roles may have already been filled by then.

## 5) Don't know where to apply?

If you want to start a career in banking, it may seem difficult to decide which career path to take as there are many areas and different roles. Remember that the same division may have a different name depending on the bank and that some specializations may be classified differently depending on the bank as well.

Below you will find a list of the most common divisions within a bank:

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Corporate Finance/Investment Banking/M&A | Treasury         |
| Sales and Trading/Global Markets         | Technology       |
| Asset Management                         | Risk Management  |
| Wealth Management                        | Operations       |
| Transactions Banking                     | Legal Compliance |

If you want more information about financial careers, feel free to check out these useful resources.

<https://mergersandinquisitions.com/>

<https://www.fe.training/>

<http://www.unofficialguidetobanking.com/>

I hope that this article will help you make the most out of your years at university. I hope this article has provided you with a clearer picture of all the opportunities you can seize to give yourself the best chance of achieving your career aspirations.