



Career Path Guide for Students

Find out how you can make your
future career in finance a reality.





As a student interested in a career in finance, you have a lot of exciting options ahead.

But how do you know where to start? Which next steps to take, and when?

The financial industry is complex and highly competitive. There are a range of offerings to equip you not only with the practical skills required to attain a role in finance, but to differentiate yourself and achieve your goals. Use this guide to help you understand where to focus, and when.



WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR University students or recent graduates.

WHAT THIS GUIDE IS A resource with the key actions you can take to launch a career in finance.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT Find your current year and learn about the ways CFA Institute can support your learning and build the practical skills required for finance professionals.

CFA Institute: The globally recognized leader in finance education

To start your finance journey, you need a resource to help you navigate. That’s where we can help.

CFA Institute is a globally recognized leader in the investment profession, and we set and promote standards of ethics, education, and professional excellence to address the ever-evolving needs of society.

We help develop the next generation of investment professionals with programs like our flagship CFA® Program, which provides a solid foundation in investment, analysis, and real-world portfolio management skills alongside connecting with a network of over 190,000 finance professionals around the world.

Beyond global finance education, CFA Institute and its members are defining investment practices by initiating codes and standards in sustainable investing, DEI, and ethical reporting. Together, we are setting the standard for finance to make the world a better place.



Your future looks bright

From relationship manager and financial advisor to data scientist and equity research analyst, [the CFA Program](#) and specialized coursework will help you secure a full range of finance positions.

Explore [common finance roles even further](#) by visiting our website.

Investment Analysis & Management

Alternative Investments Analyst
Focuses on non-traditional assets like commodities

Equity Research Analyst
Analyzes public companies and provides investment recommendations

Fixed Income Analyst/Manager
Focuses on bonds and debt instruments, analyzing interest rates, and credit risks

Hedge Fund Analyst/Manager
Implements strategies for high returns while managing complex risk

Portfolio Manager
Manages investment portfolios, balancing risk against performance

Quantitative Researcher/Analyst
Develops models and strategies using mathematical techniques

Real Estate Investment Analyst/Manager
Analyzes property values and manages real estate portfolios

Economic & Market Research

Economic Analyst
Studies economic factors influencing financial markets

Banking & Capital Markets

Investment Banking Analyst
Assists in corporate transactions, such as mergers and capital raisings

Private Equity Associate
Manages investments in private companies or handles private transactions

Sales & Trading
Facilitates the buying and selling of securities between institutions

Corporate Finance & Strategy

Capital Budgeting Analyst
Evaluates the financial profitability of major investment projects

Corporate Financial Analyst
Evaluates financial performance, forecasting, and budgeting

Financial Controller
Oversees accounting and financial reporting processes using mathematical techniques

Financial Strategist/Planner
Guides long-term financial planning and corporate strategy

Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A) Specialist
Focuses on evaluating and executing acquisition opportunities

Treasurer
Manages an organization's capital, ensuring liquidity and managing risk

Risk, Compliance & Audit

Internal Auditor
Reviews and ensures the accuracy of financial statements and compliance with internal controls

Performance Analyst
Evaluates investment performance against benchmarks over time

Regulatory Compliance Officer
Ensures financial institutions comply with regulations and laws

Risk Manager
Identifies potential risks to protect a company's assets and operations

Advisory, Consulting & Client Relationship

Consultant in Financial Services
Advises businesses on a range of financial matters, from mergers to risk management

Financial Advisor
Offers financial planning and investment advice to clients

Management Consultant, Financial Focus
Assists businesses in refining financial strategies, improving operations, or undergoing transformations

Private Banking & Wealth Management
Provides financial services to high-net-worth individuals

Relationship Manager
Manages client relationships, ensuring financial products align with client needs

Your finance journey starts here

The industry gold standard for effective and ethical investment management practices, the CFA Program is recognized around the world. It’s designed to provide you with the kind of expertise and real-world skills in investment analysis that will help you develop a successful future in finance — and land the ideal full-time role.

No matter where you are in your student journey, the following are core actions you can take to cultivate your finance career.



REDUCED FEES FOR STUDENTS

CFA Institute offers thousands of discounted enrollments each year to deserving recipients based on needs and role.

3+ YEARS AWAY FROM GRADUATION

You’re just getting started on your academic journey, so now is the time to explore and set the direction for your university career.

2 YEARS AWAY FROM GRADUATION

At this stage, you are getting closer to clarifying your finance career goals.

1 YEAR AWAY FROM GRADUATION

With one year left in school, there are more specific actions you can take — from courses to networking — that will jumpstart your finance career.

POST GRADUATE

Now that you’ve graduated, you can dive even deeper into advanced courses and more. Explore common finance roles even further by visiting our website

**Complete the
Investment Foundations Certificate**

Gain an overview of the global investment industry to help determine if finance is the right path for you. Improve your resume, amp up your knowledge for internship interviews, and signal to prospective internship employers your interest in a finance career.

Note that this is an online, self-paced curriculum; estimated at 60–90 hours of time to complete.

Foundational Knowledge

Improved Resume

**Demonstrated Interest
in Finance**

Participate in Local CFA Society Events

Gain access to a network of like-minded individuals who are at various stages of their own finance career and learning via our 160+ professional CFA societies around the world. Attending in-person events is a great entry point into the local investment community to connect with like-minded peers and mentors.

Networking

Knowledge Sharing

800+
UNIVERSITIES

More than 800+ universities around the world incorporate the CFA Program curriculum into their degree programs via the [University Affiliation Program](#), offering unmatched expertise that not only equip you to enter the investment world, but also excel in it.

“

Passing the first two levels of the exam before I graduated college has really helped me to get noticed in the industry and make me a really competitive candidate for various positions.

—Anar Bold,
CFA Charterholder

3+ Years away from Graduation

You're early in your university career, but it's not too early to start exploring — and getting a head start on — your potential career in finance. Whether you're already certain a career in finance is right for you or just seeing what your options are, these actions will take you closer to success.

YOUR CAREER IN FINANCE CHECKLIST

- ✓ Work with your advisor(s) to determine your desired field(s) of study.
- ✓ Explore [various finance career paths](#).
- ✓ Learn the professional skills you'll need for your likely path, or the best general approach if you aren't yet decided.
- ✓ Take advantage of finance or investing clubs that can supplement your academic understanding with practical application.
- ✓ Determine if your university is part of any finance networks (such as the [CFA Institute University Affiliation Program](#)) and reach out to an associated professor to learn more.



2 Years away from Graduation

You’ve decided on your area of academic focus and are excited about pursuing a career in finance. Now is the time to maximize your potential — and your skillset. But the path to get there may not be clear: *Should I focus on near-term opportunities to secure a position immediately following graduation? Attend grad school to further my education immediately, or wait a few years? How can I secure a great internship?*

YOUR CAREER IN FINANCE CHECKLIST

- ✓

Network to cultivate potential job leads, including virtual outreach, enriching your digital presence, and connecting via local events.
- ✓

Acquire the practical finance skills you’ll need to succeed on your finance journey.
- ✓

Develop strong interview skills with advance preparation and company-specific research.
- ✓

Land a great internship with leading companies and organizations like CFA Institute.

CFA OFFERINGS TO SUPPORT

BENEFITS

▶ Enroll in Level I CFA Program

Learn the practical skills needed to succeed in your internship and signal a commitment and aptitude for working in investment-related positions.

Practical Skills

Path to Earn CFA Charter

Complete the Investment Foundations Certificate

Not sure if you are ready for the CFA Level I exam? Improve your resume and signal commitment to future employers by completing this foundational course designed for non-finance majors.

Improved Resume

Demonstrated Initiative

Foundational Knowledge

Participate in Local Society Events

Gain access to a global network of like-minded individuals and signal to potential internship employers your commitment to the profession.

Networking

Knowledge Sharing

Participate in a Research Challenge

Cultivate hands-on experience and networking opportunities. Strengthen your resume and increase your appeal to potential internships. Apply knowledge, teamwork, communication, and other soft skills to show you’re work-ready with communication and teamworking skills.

Hands-on Experience

Networking

1.4X MORE SUCCESSFUL

CFA Program Level I exam pass rate is 1.4x higher than professionals (2021-2024)

“

I was in my financial derivatives class at LSU and my professor talked about this test that he described as ‘being the most challenging there was’ because it covered all areas of finance including accounting and economics. He said only his best students had ever gone on to pass it. I remember thinking ‘challenge accepted.’

—Jeffrey Metzger
Level I CFA Program



1 Year away from Graduation

With just a year left in school, it's time to enjoy every second of your experience. It's also time to solidify your post-graduation plans. Whether that means securing a great full-time position, seeking a master's degree, or strengthening your credentials through an accreditation program, CFA Institute is here to support you — and help you stand out from the crowd.

YOUR CAREER IN FINANCE CHECKLIST

- ✓

Expand your finance skillset and hone your ability to succeed in a leading finance career.
- ✓

Decide on a full-time role or continue your learning by going on to graduate school — or do both.
- ✓

Set yourself apart from the competition by perfecting your interview skills and improving your resume.
- ✓

Learn about the latest industry trends, from new technology to sustainability.

CFA OFFERINGS TO SUPPORT

BENEFITS

▶ Enroll in Level I CFA Program

Gain the practical skills needed to succeed in competitive full-time roles within the finance industry. Strengthen your resume by signaling both a commitment and aptitude for working in the field.

Practical Skills

Improved Resume

Enroll in the Sustainable Investing Certificate

Cultivate an aptitude for sustainable investing best practices, showing initiative and a commitment to this important and evolving market landscape. Designed as a supplement or early alternative to the Charterholder path. *Note: Includes approximately 100 hours of self-study.*

Sustainable Investing Knowledge

Demonstrated Initiative

Participate in a Research Challenge

Get hands-on experience and expand your networking opportunities. Strengthen your resume to increase appeal among potential future employers as well as show your teamwork, communication, and other soft skills that demonstrate that you're work-ready with strong communication and teamworking skills.

Hands-on Experience

Networking

Participate in Local Society Events

Gain access to a global network of like-minded individuals — and an entry point into the local investment community.

Networking

Knowledge Sharing

68%+
GREATER EARNING
POTENTIAL

In a study of average salaries, CFA Charterholders had higher earning potential compared to other professional designations including MBAs and CPAs.

“
Getting ready for the CFA Exam during my internship and the last year of my economics degree was a great challenge, but I am glad that I made that decision.

—Diego Bellico
Level I CFA Program

CFA OFFERINGS TO SUPPORT

BENEFITS

▶ [Enroll in Level I CFA Program](#)

There's still time to begin your journey to become a CFA Charterholder. Gain the practical skills needed to succeed in competitive full-time roles in finance. Signal both a commitment and aptitude for working in the industry. You can also extend and build upon your LI knowledge with our Level II and Level III curriculum.

Practical Skills

Charterholder Path

Enroll in the [Sustainable Investing Certificate](#)

Cultivate an aptitude for sustainable investing best practices, showing initiative and a commitment to this important and evolving market landscape. Designed for those not interested in pursuing the Charterholder path.

Sustainable Investing Knowledge

Demonstrated Initiative

Participate in [Local Society Events](#)

Gain access to a global network of like-minded individuals — and an entry point into the local investment community.

Networking

Knowledge Sharing

Post Graduate

You've graduated and are headed into your finance career (congrats!). You have a clear sense of your professional goals and are transitioning into the workforce or to the next level of education. If it's the former, your priority is securing the right position for you — and succeeding once you're in it. The key? Continuing to improve your practical skills.

YOUR CAREER IN FINANCE CHECKLIST

- ✔ Set yourself apart from the competition by honing your resume, [fine-tuning your interview skills](#), and advanced coursework.
- ✔ Stay current with the [latest industry trends](#), from sustainable investing to navigating the future state of the investment industry.
- ✔ Decide to move into a full-time role with a leading institution, continue your finance learning, or both.
- ✔ [Build your network](#) by cultivating virtual connections, establishing your digital profile, and connecting via professional events.

TRUSTED BY TOP EMPLOYERS

CFA Charterholders are sought after by leading financial services institutions, including **JPMorgan Chase & Co.**, **Blackrock**, **Goldman Sachs**, **Ernst & Young**, and **HSBC Bank**.

“

I learned about what people expect a young professional to know in order to step up in the industry.

—Pinlin Song
Level I CFA Program

We're here to help.

With a growing portfolio of certificates and courses available, we have a range of ways to expand your knowledge and skillset, including our core offerings to the right.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

[Level I CFA Program](#)

[Investment Foundations Certificate](#)

[Research Challenge](#)

[Sustainable Investing Certificate](#)

[Local Society Events](#)