FAQ Career Seminar

- Referring to salary figures, are the sums shown pre- or after tax?
  - The salaries shown are pre-tax. This is also always the case while negotiating salaries in Germany. The negotiation always bases on the gross salary, meaning before tax and social securities. Since the tax framework in Germany is very complex and the deduction from the gross salary will be up to 30 or 40 per cent, we recommend the use of a salary calculator to set your preferences ahead.

- There are more opportunities with higher remuneration towards some southern cities like Stuttgart, Munich, etc. Does that mean that the cost of living, housing and tax are also much higher? Is the housing shortage more problematic in these places since most people are keen to move to these places?
  - The cost of living is definitely much higher in these locations. However, a higher remuneration does not automatically mean wealthier life, because you may spend more on rent and other expenses. Therefore, it is important to consider this when you negotiate about the salary. There are regions with lower salary levels where the cost of living is oftentimes also lower.

- I have completed my bachelor’s study in environmental engineering in Germany. Because the course was in German only, it was not easy for me as a foreign student. Hence, my bachelor's result wasn’t excellent. I plan to continue my studies by enrolling into a master's degree in that field. For my future career, do you think this would be worth it? Will my bachelor’s grades affect my future career?
  - It always depends on the individual setup, so it's very difficult to give a generic answer. The most crucial thing is the profession you wish to occupy and the sector / branch you are aiming for. Because the final grade might not the decisive factor for the companies. Many of them do not pay a lot of attention to the final grade, they would rather look at your personal motivation, your experiences, or the knowledge you've obtained, and the list goes on. As mentioned in the presentation earlier, soft skills and personal motivation are decisive. So, it's certainly beneficial to obtain a master's program and it's also great for your final grade to look nice, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that imperfect final grades lead to bad jobs. Therefore, the decision making is personal.

- I have previous work experiences covering some aspects of teamwork and other skills. Should I specifically mention my soft skills? If yes, should it be mentioned in my CV or the cover letter?
  - How does the employer evaluate soft skills?
    - I would say you can list your soft skills on your resume. Personally, I’m not a big fan of doing that. However, many candidates leave space for a separate section, in order to list their soft skills. If you choose to do that, make sure having a written classification, while avoiding graphics (such as stars or a bar indicating levels). Those graphics are not readable for ATS tools. I would recommend to include the soft skills in your cover letter while giving a short example, how and where you have acquired those skills. So, make sure to provide an example tied to your mentioned soft skill, because otherwise, your soft skills would sound superficial. In general, soft skills comes into focus once you are at the job interview. Even if you didn’t list them on your resume, it’s usually fine because real soft skills are something that cannot be hidden. They will shine through you while communicating with the interviewer. If you have work experience already, I think it’s better to give the interviewer a peak into your previous tasks at work. By doing so, a natural assumption of certain soft skills will be made about the ones you’ve gained over time, which you can present in the cover letter. Those soft skills can be determined by certain tests, but usually, it’s more prevalent in job interview questions. For instance, we asked for challenges you’ve faced, failures
you’ve experienced, how you’ve learned from them for specific soft skills, and how you can apply them. So it’s undoubtedly an element in the job interview itself.

- What is the maximum salary for student visa per year?
  - I’m not sure what you meant by student visa. The maximum salary is not tied to your student visa but there’s a minimum salary for a work visa or an employment permit. However, for student visa holders, there’s a limit applied on the total working hours.
  - The limit used to be around 450€ per month. Due to the increase from previous rates of minimum wage to 12 EUR per hour in 2022, the total limit has also been risen. The precise number can change over time quite often, that's why we advise you to always check for the newest regulation online, in order to be up to date.

- My internship can be credited, but it doesn’t belong to the mandatory internships. How can I describe my situation while looking for an internship?
  - In general, the decisive factor is, whether you receive a document by your university, stating that the internship is part of your study program, or not. Usually, this is a document signed by the university and the employer, confirming that you are doing an internship that will be credited later on. The way of documentation varies by case, but if no confirmation can be provided, classifying it as a mandatory internship would be inconceivable. That would be an extremely rare and specific case, and I've never encountered something that unusual. Normally, it is very clear whether or not you receive credits. And if you would receive credits for it, then proving that as part of your study program should also be possible, although I'm not 100% sure.

- Is it better to refine my CV into one single page with more compact information, or is it better to write more detailed about experiences from work or academics?
  - I think it depends, and it’s a personal preference. If you have work experience, I prefer two pages of CVs. Often times, if you try to squeeze everything onto one page, certain information disappear. On the other hand, one page of CV is great, if your experience is still limited, and you’re just getting started. However, if you realize that you are struggling squeezing all the information onto one page, I would alternatively prefer two pages, while adding a bit more information, since two pages are absolutely fine. By doing so, the data will not be squeezed onto a limited amount of space, where important stuff are usually overlooked. I would recommend two pages of CV for people with work experience, but still, it’s my personal preference.

- Is it worth it applying for vacancies clearly stating “sehr gute Deutschkenntnisse”, even though my German is only A2 / B1? What about, if the employment ad is written in German, but no requirement of German language is stated? What is your opinion?

- Do you recommend writing the CV & cover letter in German?
  - My recommendation in general is to always take the job description as an indicator for the language of your application. If the job is published in German language, I would assume that German is the main working language, and they expect you to have an application in the German language. If German was the case, I would try to apply in German. In that case the language skills or requirements are not listed for various reasons, that would be either they simply forgot, or the natural assumption that applicants will solely be German speakers. If English is going to be the main spoken language, they will publish their advertisement in English. I would suggest this rule of thumb, so make sure to stick to the language of communication of the job description. If you find an advertisement that states “sehr gute Deutschkenntnisse”, which equals to excellent German skills, and doesn’t match your level, it is still fine to apply, in my opinion. But I would say that only applies if you do bear an amount of German language skills, since they will try to interview you in German, being able to hold basic conversations would be beneficial. However, it doesn’t mean that you have to be perfect in German. In my experience, companies are also willing to compromise, if you are a strong candidate with a great profile. So, if that is the case, showing your motivation to learn German is more important. Nonetheless, if they require great language skill, then accordingly, some basic skills to hold a conversation is necessary.

- Is it advisable to use Times New Roman font for a CV and cover letter or should we strictly use Arial?
That’s a matter of personal taste. Times New Roman is also okay although I prefer Arial, but both are fine since they are part of the standard fonts.

About the work permit: will companies assist non-EU students to apply for the residence permit?

It depends on what you mean with assist. In general, the employer has to provide certain documents for non-EU employees. So, the employer will have to fill out the declaration of employment for you anyway. A job description and an employment contract are needed in order to apply for your work permit. Therefore, this kind of assistance are the minimum they will do. Providing support beyond that, such as communication with German authorities, solely depends on the employer. I know some employers who really make the effort to help their employees, but there are also some whose experience are limited and aren’t familiar with the process. It certainly depends on the company, but at least they will have to provide you few necessary documents of the process. Also, I see an increasing number of employers who are experienced with residence permit, who proactively helps. However, smaller companies might have limited experience, then you have to figure it out together. In my vast experience assisting people with their residence permit, oftentimes their HR or supervisors are highly supportive, who are trying to help them arranging the paper work.