

Five jobs that are surprisingly enjoyable

Level 3 | Advanced

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The beginning of the year is probably prime-time for feeling glum about work: it's ages until the next holiday, and it's dark in the morning and when you get home. And, if you're stuck in a job you don't like, it could be enough to have you reaching for your CV.

But, before you start hunting through the job ads, try to put things in perspective. So, what else could you be doing instead? We asked five people doing some unusual jobs how much they are paid, what the worst parts are and why they enjoy their work.

1. Dog-food taster

The job: Tasting dog food to make sure it meets a premium brand's quality standards

What it involves: Opening sample tins of each freshly made batch of dog (or cat) food, smelling it and eating it. "Although dogs' palates are different from ours, taste is an important quality check to ensure each different ingredient is perfectly balanced in just the right way," says Philip Wells, the chief taster for Lily's Kitchen pet food. "Trying the food is also a good way to pick up on the nuances of the cooking; this works especially well on the dry food."

Typical salary: £20,000 for an entry-level job in the quality department. However, Wells says £50,000 or more is "easily achievable" for an experienced technical director who, as well as tasting products, is also likely to be responsible for developing new recipes and advising the business on technical and regulatory matters.

Worst part of the job: The deadlines, for Wells, who admits he quite likes the food. The meat used in pet food has to be derived from animals passed as fit for human consumption, under the Animal Feed Regulations 2010, and he says the firm uses "human-grade freshly prepared raw food" in its recipes. He adds: "There are some pretty gruesome pet foods out there and, although I don't taste them, the smell is enough to turn the stomach when I do a bit of market research."

Job satisfaction: "No two days are ever the same." It's rewarding, Wells says, that a project he has worked on will "help pets to become happier and healthier". However, he acknowledges that some of the credit must go to another "key member" of the tasting team: Lily, the border terrier.

2. Hygiene technician

The job: Disinfecting areas that have potentially been exposed to bio-hazardous situations

What it involves: Cleaning up crime scenes, road accidents and suicides. Clearing hoarders' houses full of rubbish, rats and excrement ... among other things. "The job is about keeping people safe," says Richard Lewis, a hygiene technician for Rentokil. "We deal with some very disturbingly dirty sites."

Typical salary: The entry-level salary is usually around £14,500 and a top salary can be up to £22,000.

Worst part of the job: Cleaning up after suicides. "You get used to the job being disgusting but the emotional side of it is still hard." You learn not to take your work home with you, he says. "You also need to have a sense of humour, as some days can be tough."

Job satisfaction: Lewis finds the variety of tasks exciting. "One day, I'm cleaning up after a dead body; another day, I'm in a prison cell or 100 feet in the air being lowered down into a silo to clean it." He also takes pride in the transformation he brings about. "It's satisfying to return a potentially hazardous site back to a safe environment. And it benefits society."

3. Biogas engineer

The job: Setting up biogas plants in developing countries

What it involves: Linking a system of digesters – which can be filled with human excrement, animal dung and other waste products – to toilets to produce a biogas that can be used for cooking and lighting. "You have to know what size and shape the mixing pit needs to be, how to create the optimum temperature for digestion and where to situate the biogas plant," says Baburam Paudel, chief technical officer in Nepal for the charity Renewable World. "You also have to convince poor communities that poo can be productive – many are repelled by the idea of connecting their toilets to their kitchens."

Typical salary: An entry-level salary is around £10,000, while a typical salary for a chief technical officer is £30,000.

Worst part of the job: For Paudel, it's seeing people struggling to survive on very little income. But, he admits, anyone who won't change a nappy would struggle. "You have to be willing to get your hands dirty during the build process and inspections. Unsurprisingly, the anaerobic digestion (the process that takes place when bacteria eat the decomposing waste and produce methane) smells like rotten eggs. It can be disgusting and there is no room for mistakes."

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Level 3 | Advanced

Job satisfaction: "I find it immensely satisfying to know that I am helping people to increase their incomes and allowing girls to attend school by replacing the need to collect firewood," says Paudel. "My work improves the health and hygiene of whole communities."

4. Eel ecologist

The job: Conserving the critically endangered European eel

What it involves: To monitor the size of the endangered eels, ecologists wade into the Thames and other London rivers and marshes full of eels, sometimes up to their armpits, and reach into a net filled with up to 20 adult eels to grab one with their bare hands. "Adult eels can be a metre long, or even larger, and weigh up to 2kg. They're not at all dangerous but they are almost pure muscle and they can be a little bit slimy," says Stephen Mowat, an eel conservationist and ecologist for the Zoological Society of London. "We have to weigh and measure them, and they wriggle ... a lot. It's difficult to look professional while crawling on the ground chasing an eel across the grass."

Worst part of the job: "Eels are really tricky creatures to work with – and getting outsmarted by an eel can be quite embarrassing," says Mowat. "You also have to be ready to jump from one project to the next. I once had to dissect a tub of dead eels to examine parasites living in them, moments before jumping into a suit for a meeting with government officials. I remembered to wash my hands." But, for Mowat, the worst part of the job is definitely not handling the eels – he believes baby eels (known as elvers) are "as cute as pandas": "The worst thing about the job is regularly learning how much damage we, the British population, are doing to the environment."

Job satisfaction: "Getting to work outdoors and seeing British wildlife up close is the best part of the

job," says Mowat. "Eels are beautiful creatures and working with eels doesn't just benefit the eel: it helps whole river systems, estuaries and coastal habitats. That is something worth working on."

5. Shopping channel presenter

The job: Selling and demonstrating a wide range of products on live TV

What it involves: Presenting hours and hours of monotonous content, while simultaneously demonstrating the products and appearing to be enthusiastic and knowledgeable about everything that you're selling. "I prepare and research as much technical and practical information as possible on every single product beforehand," says Shaun Ryan, presenter for Ideal World TV. "But you also need the ability to relate to every genre of products and to every viewer."

Typical salary: A trainee presenter would start on a minimum of £30,000, while an experienced presenter can expect over £55,000.

Worst part of the job: "The unsociable hours," says Ryan. "An experienced presenter like myself generally gets to work prime-time hours, which means all weekends, bank holidays and very late evenings, plus the occasional 5am shift." His worst task ever, he says, was singlehandedly having to sell some female slimming pants: "It was a very tricky hour and not my finest."

Job satisfaction: "I love the rush of live presenting and having to think on my feet every second," says Ryan. "I also get an adrenaline rush from knowing that, at times, I have thousands of viewers ordering the product that I have just been presenting."

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3 Comprehension check

What can you remember? Try to answer the questions without referring back to the article.

Who ...

1. ... needs to be able to relate to people?
2. ... finds it rewarding to help animals?
3. ... sometimes finds it difficult to look professional?
4. ... finds it satisfying to help people?
5. ... finds the variety of tasks exciting?

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5 Expressions

- a. Complete the expressions from the article with the missing word. The first letter is given to help you.
 - b. Find the expressions in the article, discuss what they mean and think of other ways to express the sentiments.
1. put things in p _____
 2. s _____ to mind
 3. fit for human c _____
 4. t _____ the stomach
 5. take your w _____ home with you
 6. t _____ pride in
 7. think on my f _____

6 Discussion

- Talk about the worst or most unusual job you have ever done. What was so bad or unusual about it?
- Find out if anyone else in the group has done a similar job.

7 Writing

Write a job advertisement for one of the five jobs in the article. Try to make the job sound as attractive and appealing as possible. Include qualities that applicants should possess in order to do the job and state the salary (if known).

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1 Warmer

a. In three minutes, write at least five jobs you would really hate to do.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

b. Choose the worst one and say why you would not want to do it.

c. Skim the article and see whether any of the five jobs mentioned are similar to the ones you wrote down.

2 Key words

Read the definitions and find the words in the article. The sections of the article are given to help you.

Section 1

1. ability to taste and judge the flavours in food and drinks _____
2. giving you satisfaction, pleasure or profit _____
3. praise for something you have done or achieved _____

Section 2

4. dangerous, especially to people's health or safety _____
5. people who get and keep a large amount of something because they think it might be valuable or useful later

6. the solid waste that your body gets rid of _____
7. a tall, round tower on a farm used for storing things such as grain and crops _____

Section 3

8. factories that produce power or process chemicals etc _____
9. disgusted by something you think is extremely unpleasant so that you want to avoid it

10. decaying by a slow natural process, especially through the action of particular bacteria or fungi

Section 4

11. a long, thin fish that looks like a snake _____
12. at risk of extinction _____
13. when someone has gained an advantage over you, especially by using a clever or dishonest trick

14. cut the body of a dead person or animal into parts in order to examine it _____

Section 5

15. happening or done at the same time _____
16. done by one person without help from anyone else _____

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4 Collocations

a. Match the words to make collocations from the article.

b. Write the jobs they are used to describe.

1. bio-hazardous

2. crime

3. prison

job: _____

a. cell

b. situation

c. scenes

4. pure

5. bare

6. government

job: _____

a. hands

b. official

c. muscle

7. adrenaline

8. unsociable

9. monotonous

job: _____

a. hours

b. rush

c. content

10. quality

11. market

12. perfectly

job: _____

a. balanced

b. standards

c. research

13. rotten

14. animal

15. optimum

job: _____

a. temperature

b. eggs

c. dung

c. Discuss the meanings of the collocations and say what they were used to talk about.

d. Choose one of the collocations from each section and write five sentences of your own containing them.