



AN ODE TO PERSONAL FINANCE FROM A FRESH GRADUATE



AN ODE TO PERSONAL FINANCE FROM A FRESH GRADUATE

- \$3.99 – mixers for pre drinks
- \$12.51 – nipple tape
- \$7 – tampons

- \$2.80 – hungover croissant

Such was a snippet of my bank statements during my final year at college. None of these transactions were things I necessarily remembered—or things that made much sense—until Citibank arranged them in chronological order and lined them up for me to inspect. Which I occasionally did, often while checking my balance and hoping it would get me through two more weekends of going out (and realistically some late-night treats after a long evening in the library). I'll start a Note on my phone next month to track everything, I vowed to myself, only to end up lost between online account statements, receipts dissolved in spilled tea and 3am digital transfer payments, all infuriatingly titled with a martini emoji.

Despite this disorganisation, I've always prided myself in being somewhat financially independent. When it came to eating out, shopping, buying flights home or travelling with friends, I covered my own bases with the wages of my three well-paid campus jobs. By no means was I cut off from my parents as a student; they paid for my rent and some of my groceries throughout college and have always helped me out with larger expenses when I needed it. In fact, I caveat this entire article with the immense privilege I am fortunate enough to enjoy, but also credit my parents with teaching me how to be independent. I've never shared a bank account with them, had access to a credit card or overdraft, or charged anything to their accounts.





As of my first day in the corporate world, I'm officially on my own. As my Mom hands over her credit card for my last dentist appointment and haircut at home, she jokingly reminds me how thrilled she is about not having to pay for these things again. I then wonder how long I could feasibly go without a trim.

Combing through personal finance sites, I'm instructed to do the following: not to buy coffees out because those cappuccinos add up, to meal prep religiously and to experiment with no-spend weeks and "fun free weekend activities". I glance at my orange Monzo card, which makes me feel oh-so-millennial, and I smugly transfer £500 into a flexible cash ISA (later, Dad tells me this is about the worst thing a young person can do with their long-term savings).

I then make a "pot" of money allocated towards eating

out/coffee/drinks, into which I deposit a gingerly £50 for the month of July. Let's see how good I am about sticking to this—or maybe I need to rethink the messy calculations peppering the “Finances” tab of my Google Sheets file entitled “Life Admin”. I giggle, knowing this day would eventually come: an English major finally having to confront some maths in the struggle to deal with documenting an entry-level salary. It's annoying, though: I have to trim my Uber budget to make sure I'm contributing 5% of my salary to my pension. Something my Mum once told me suddenly rings true: when you have money, you never worry about it. But when you don't—that's when you find yourself thinking about it all the time.

I'm learning how to input arithmetic formulas and build a basic budget, but where do I plug in the emotional croissant I cave into on a glum Tuesday afternoon, the bunch of flowers I think will make me feel better, or the uncertainty of a new life? How do I create a reasonable safety net for myself in case of medical emergencies or last-minute travel without turning into an anti-social hermit who eats week-old pasta for dinner?

I'm also learning how to not know everything, because I won't be able to plan for every transaction or cost. I won't know the average cost of my utility bills until enough months have gone by that I can actually calculate that amount.

I may not know the value of a hastily purchased lunch at Pret, until I realise that meal means skipping out on drinks the following weekend. In some ways this is the

opposite of financial advice, and instead a declaration that—like every new chapter—this will be a chance to learn.

Some things I've found helpful so far:

- Investing in nice lunch-boxes and keep-cups so I have everything I need to bring my lunch into work and not feel totally glum about it. Sistema does amazing salad and breakfast containers which I love!
- Simplifying expenses with a “need” and a “want” card to use for purchases accordingly. Phone bill and weekly grocery shop? Monzo. Workout class and happy hour? Revolut.
- Inviting friends over for dinner has been such a joyful ritual to welcome loved ones into the space of my home, try my hand at new recipes and indulge in a bottle of wine without the restaurant price tag.

I don't want to be a party-pooping penny-pincher of a twenty-two year old in London, but I also want to trust that I can provide for myself and work towards the kind of life I've envisioned. As long as I don't throw the entirety of my bonus at West Elm's divine but overpriced home décor, I will slowly begin to see how far each pound goes in making me happy and satisfying my needs, what my non-negotiables are and what I can do without, and where I can create space for when life just happens. I'll get there eventually — perhaps with a croissant in hand.