

RESUMES & COVER LETTERS: THINKING LIKE AN EMPLOYER

9/21/2023

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A Bit About Me



Azzam Bin Aamir (he/him)

- Career Leader at CCD
 - Workshops and Events
- Physics and Astronomy Grad from Waterloo (Cosmology + ML)
- Cat person
- Past roles: Data Scientist/Analyst, Orientation Captain, Quantum Optics R...



Whose land are we on?

We respectfully acknowledge that we work on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, which includes ten kilometers on each side of the Grand River: land promised and never returned to the Six Nations.

Some incredible local community members on IG:

Bangishimo Johnston @bangishimo, Amy Smoke @amysmoke, C. Elizabeth Best @lizbot5000

Support: O:se Kenhionhata:tie – Land Back Camp, @ose.kenhionhatatie on IG

Reports: TRC Calls to Action, National Inquiry into MMIWG

Reading: The Inconvenient Indian, 21 Things You May Not Have Known About the Indian Act, This Place: 150 Years Retold

What land are you on? native-land.ca



A Safe(r) Space

Going into this presentation, my intention is to create as safe a space as possible.

A safe space means different things for everyone, but we'll do our best! Let's keep 3 things in mind:

- **Choice**
- **Respect**
- **Care**
- Participate in a way that feels most comfortable to you!
- Take what works for you and leave what doesn't.



Photo by Dennis Leinarts from Pexels



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Today's Roadmap

- 4 Steps towards crafting a great job application
- The importance of skills identification & articulation
- Steps, strategies, tools and tips for crafting:

Part 1: Resumes

Part 2: Cover Letters



Steps towards building a great job application

1



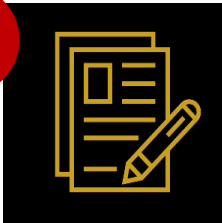
IDENTIFY your skills, interests, experience, values and work search goals.

2



ANALYZE job description(s) and **IDENTIFY** what employers are looking for in a successful candidate.

3



DESIGN & CREATE a document that showcases how you could contribute through your skills/experience.

4



REFINE your document to ensure it is making the right impression, highlighting your strengths, and speaking to employers.



SKILLS CAN COME FROM ANYWHERE



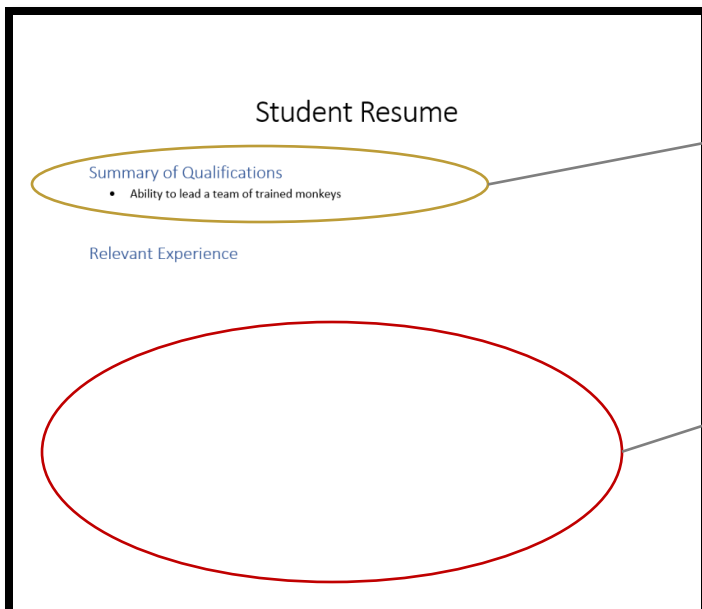
Image from: <https://blog.jobactive.gov.au/how-to-write-about-skills-experience-your-resume>

- Formal / informal training, courses, workshops
- Relevant skills/experience:
 - Paid jobs
 - Volunteering
 - Student club
 - Extracurricular activities
- Relevant projects/achievements
- Awards and recognitions



Why Skills Articulation is Important

- Employers usually identify the skills they want, but the articulation is up us!
 - Employer: “We want **RED**”
 - Job seeker: “I have vibrant candy apple red with hues of crimson and cerise”
- Job seekers often name their skills, but leave out evidence and context...
 - E.g., “Excellent communication skills, ability to work independently and with a team”



Summary of Qualifications: “Ability to lead a team of trained monkeys”

Remainder of resume/cover letter: no mention of or evidence for trained monkey management



The background is a solid bright yellow. On the left side, there is a vertical stack of three colored rectangular blocks: a red one at the top, a light purple one in the middle, and a light pink one at the bottom. A horizontal red bar extends from the top-left corner towards the center. A horizontal light purple bar is positioned below the light purple block on the left. A horizontal light pink bar is positioned below the light pink block on the left. A horizontal cyan bar extends from the left edge towards the right edge. On the right side, a thick blue vertical line runs from the top to the bottom. A light purple diagonal bar starts from the bottom right and extends towards the top right. A red vertical bar is located at the bottom right corner.

PART 1: RESUMES

STEPS TOWARDS BUILDING A GREAT RESUME



IDENTIFY your skills, interests, experience, values and work search goals.



ANALYZE job description(s) and **IDENTIFY** what employers are looking for in a successful candidate.



DESIGN & CREATE a document that showcases how you could contribute via your skills/experience.



REFINE your document to ensure it is making the right impression, highlighting your strengths, and speaking to employers.



Role/Activity/Project/ Class/Club	Experience	Skills/Attributes
Took Biol 130 (Introductory Cell Biology)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Completed a DNA extraction and sequencing project and created a presentation for the class (received a grade of 89%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Project management- Communication and presentation skills -Laboratory skills (DNA extraction and bacteria culture)
Organized Fundraiser for Environmental Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organized and scheduled club meetings, annual clothing drive, bake sale events -Created posters and advertising material for events -Managed the club's community bank account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Microsoft Excel, Canva -Event planning, organization, and management -Budget and financial reviews
Part-time Waiter at a Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coordinated activities with other staff to ensure tasks were done quickly and accurately -Commended twice by manager for excellent customer service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Time management and problem solving -Customer service and relationship building

What skills do I want to (further) develop?

STEPS TOWARDS BUILDING A GREAT RESUME



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THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

“Recognize that most employers are using the résumé to screen you out rather than to select you in.”

Derek Chapman, Ph.D.,
Professor of Industrial Organization and Psychology
at the Haskayne School of Business

THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

What are employers looking for?

- Accomplishments and results – not duties performed
- Relevant knowledge/skills/education/experience
- Personality (and how it fits)

What problems do they notice?

- Vague, confusing or irrelevant content
- Poor written communication
- Lack of visual appeal/formatting consistency
- "Here's what you can do for me"



Making Your Case

- Why are you a match for the job?
 - Identify the employer's "wish list"
 - Identify your skills & experiences
 - Create a table if it helps!



JOB DESCRIPTION ANALYSIS

Administrative Assistant | Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada is an international **leader** in providing innovative services for people with MS and their families and advancing research into the cause and cure of multiple sclerosis. Reporting to the Finance Department, the successful candidate will be involved in the regular **processing of financial transactions** at the chapter, division, and national office level as well as a number of Finance projects supporting different business units. We are looking for an **enthusiastic** individual to fill an Administrative Assistant position with us.

Specific job responsibilities:

- Enter bank deposits from regional locations into accounting system
- Processing of **accounts payable and accounts receivable** transactions
- Review financial statements and maintain cash flow schedules for all locations on a monthly basis
- Complete **financial analysis** for various projects
- Assist with **budget analysis** and preparation of budget templates for next fiscal year
- Generate **tax receipts** for donations to fundraising events, process credit cards and encode cheques for fundraising events
- Assist with formatting and distribution of financial statements as required and other finance members with filing as required

Required qualifications:

- Working knowledge of **Microsoft Office suite**, including strong working knowledge of **Excel**
- Familiarity with **accounting software** with working knowledge being a benefit
- Detail and **deadline oriented** and able to work in a fast paced environment
- Demonstrate a strong **attention to detail** with a high level of accuracy
- Possess excellent **time management** skills with the ability to prioritize multiple tasks
- Ability to **solve problems** and practice good decision-making
- Strong **communication** skills, both oral and written, accompanied by solid **interpersonal** skills

DRAWING CONNECTIONS

Draw connections between what employers want and what you have.

What employer wants	Evidence I have it
Time management	Effectively balanced role as club president and a full-course load while maintaining Honour Roll status.
Verbal communication	Prepared and delivered 15-minute presentation to a panel of judges; received feedback that ideas were clearly communicated and convincing.
Microsoft Excel	Created functional Excel spreadsheet to club meetings; increased efficiency of scheduling process.

RESUME SECTIONS AND STYLING

Name

Location, Telephone, Email

LinkedIn, Website, Portfolio

Summary of Qualifications

Relevant Experience

Relevant Projects

Volunteer Experience

Education

Awards & Scholarships

Professional Memberships

Publications

Presentations

Activities and Interests

- Include any relevant experience.
- Prioritize/order/place your resume sections based on relevance.
- Maintain visual appeal and clarity to capture employer attention.
- Consider industry standards – 1 or 2 pages?



SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

A “highlight reel” of 4-6 points that demonstrate your fit for the job.

- Relevant experience/accomplishments related to your field/industry.
- Relevant knowledge/skills/expertise (language, technical, transferrable).
- Education/awards that complement practical experience.
- Relevant personal characteristics and attributes.
- Specialized training/education relevant to the objective.
- **Make sure to reference where or how you developed the above skill**

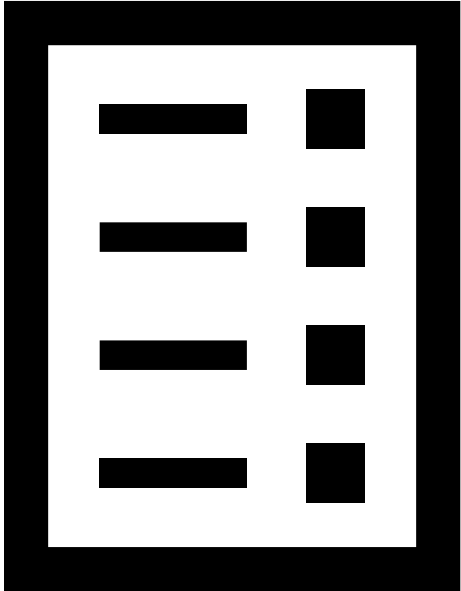
WRITING EXPERIENCE BULLET POINTS

- **Paint a picture with words** (help the employer envision you doing those jobs).
- **WHAT—HOW—WHY**

WHAT you did	HOW you did it	WHY it's important
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action or achievement verb (e.g., arranged, updated, prepared)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tool (e.g., programming language)• Approach/methodology• Adverb (e.g., effectively, accurately)• Role (e.g., member, treasurer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Result or accomplishment• Outcome• Impact• Quantify where possible



More Bullet Point Tips



A few strategies:

- Skill + Evidence
- What + How + Why
- Action + Impact
- Job duties/responsibilities

A few tactics:

- “Key words”
- Action verbs
- Quantification
- Bolding/emphasis



What if your resume is being run through an ATS?

ATS = Applicant Tracking System



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PRO TIP

Consider creating a “master resume”.

A master resume contains ALL of your experiences and different versions of the same bullet point for a specific experience/skill.

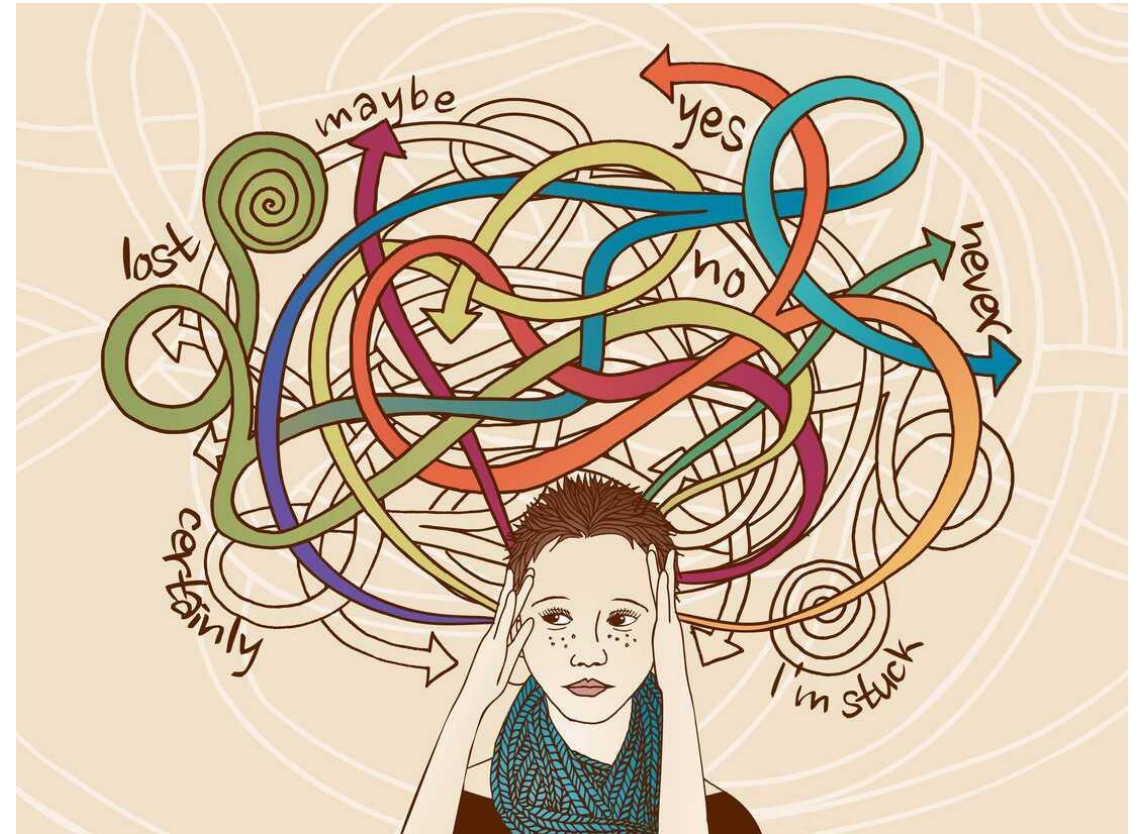


PART 2: COVER LETTERS

The background is a solid bright yellow. It features several abstract geometric elements: a red L-shaped bar in the top-left corner; a light purple L-shaped bar below it; a horizontal bar at the bottom composed of a light purple segment on the left and a teal segment on the right; a thick blue vertical bar on the right side that curves at the bottom; and a light purple diagonal bar crossing the bottom right area.

Common Cover Letter Misconceptions

- A cover letter is a summary of your resume in paragraph form
- Employers don't read cover letters
- Cover letters are too time consuming to be worth including in my application



Stock photo from npr.org



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The function of a cover letter



- Cover letter = bridge between resume and interview
- A place to...
 - Demonstrate your interest in the role
 - Go into detail! (Skills, experiences, etc.)
 - Explain things – if you want to
 - Show you've done your research



Prioritizing job applications

Job Applications

High priority

Jobs that align very well with my interests/career goals

Mid-priority

Jobs that are appealing but not in complete alignment with my interests/career goals

Low priority

Jobs in minimal alignment with my interests/career goals

- When should I submit a cover letter?
- How much time should I invest tailoring my cover letter?
- Is it OK to submit a generic cover letter?



How to Write a Cover Letter

One option: **Write your cover letter like a research paper!**

- Form a hypothesis: You [x] are perfect for the job [y] because...
- Show the “correlation” between y & x
- You choose the variables! Let x be...
 - Interests? Values?
 - Skills? Experiences?
- Make the formula yours!



How to Write a Cover Letter

Another option: **Write your cover letter like a creative writing project!**

- Set the context; create story
- Who are the key actors?
- What actions did you undertake?
- What skills did you use?
- What was the consequence?
- Get creative! Applicable for all industries!



Let's talk strategy...

STEP 1: Review the job description

- Reflect on 2-3 reasons you want the job
- Highlight key words / skills
- Pay attention to tone

STEP 2: Research!

- Learn more about company: values, mission, etc.
- Consider scheduling an informational interview (informal chat with someone in the industry)

STEP 3: Start writing!

- Tailor the cover letter based on priority and capacity

Cover Letter Structure

❑ Opening

- ❑ Summarize how values/experience align with the company's requirements/mission
- ❑ Show enthusiasm by highlighting your reasons for applying
- ❑ Name the job you're applying to and how you found out about it

❑ Body

- ❑ 2-3 specific examples of why you're a good fit for the job
- ❑ Use key words from job posting

❑ Closing

- ❑ Reiterate your reason for applying
- ❑ Refer to your enclosed resume and provide contact information to follow-up

Your Name & Contact Information

 **John Doe**
 VP, Finance & Operations

john.doe@gmail.com
 416-821-9879
 Toronto, Canada

To: Doris Johnson
 Human Resources Manager
 Optimal Workplace Inc. 321
 Employment Avenue. Toronto,
 Canada
 21 September, 2018

linkedin.com/in/john.doe
 john.doe

Name & Address of Recipient

Date

Salutation

Dear Ms. Johnson,

Opening

As the Vice-President of Finance and Operations at a national food chain, I bring proven success in enhancing productivity and gaining an advantage when it comes to profit margins. My work spans companies and business units at varying stages of growth, from start-up to multinational organizations.

Body

With over 20 years of achieving profitability and long-term growth, I seek to monitor budgets and sales numbers closely to identify areas for improvement. I am known for enhancing performance through technology upgrades, implementing best practices, and improving employee training protocols.

Examples of my achievements include:

- Drove successful launch of start-up organization through contemporary hiring practices, defining product implementation, and developing go-to-market strategies to achieve 50% margins and \$15M+ revenue within my first three years.
- Managed daily operations of a \$100M+ consumer goods department that introduced complete line of products to the U.S. and Canada, improving profit margins by 14%.
- Proved a vital team member that conducted a complete leadership reorganization resulted in a 10% improvement in productivity within the sales department and a 1 improvement within the technical team.

Closing

As a skilled professional with a CPA degree and a background in analyzing and improving sales numbers, I am confident I will prove an asset to your company and respectfully submit my application for your review. I would like to request a meeting to discuss how I can help meet your goals. I am available at your convenience and hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
 John Doe

Respects & Your Name

Cover Letter Structure

The Body Paragraph(s)



- Show, don't tell
- Use specific examples!
- Use S.T.A.R. approach to structure examples
 - **S**ituation (What, when, who, why, where?)
 - **T**ask (what action did you take?)
 - **A**ction (What skills did you use?)
 - **R**esult (What was the outcome?)

Show Don't Tell!

Telling

“I am able to work effectively as part of a team.”

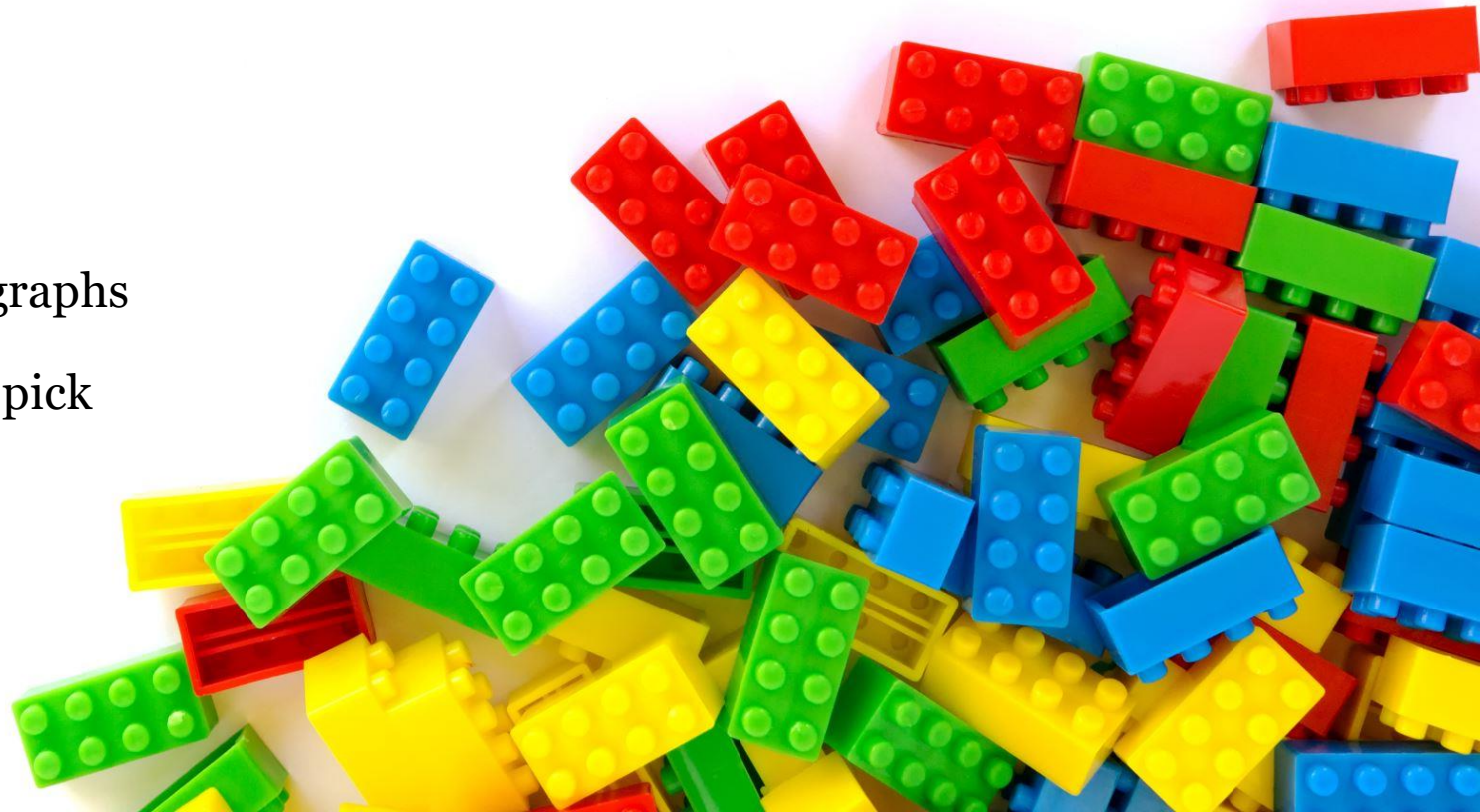
Showing

Situation	In my mechanical engineering class this year,
Task	I was required to collaborate with my peers on building a functional robot.
Action	As team lead, I leveraged my project management skills to delegate tasks as well as my communication skills to resolve inter-personal conflicts.
Result	We received top marks and our prototype will be used as an example for future classes.



Smart tailoring

- Don't write every cover letter from scratch!
- Look for patterns and recurring key words in job postings
- Try out the Lego approach:
 - Paragraphs = building blocks
 - Swap out the opening and closing paragraphs
 - Prepare multiple middle paragraphs to pick and choose from



A note on safety and disclosure in cover letters

- **Social safety:** you can share, but you don't have to share
- **Emotional safety:** what is coming up for you when writing this cover letter?
- **Accommodations:** can be requested through the company's Human Resources department
- Protected grounds from the **Ontario Human Rights Code:**
 - “Age, Ancestry, Colour, Race, Citizenship, Ethnic Origin, Place of Origin, Creed, Disability, Family Status, Marital Status, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Receipt of public Assistance, Record of Offences, Sex, Sexual Orientation” The Ontario Human Rights Code | Ontario Human Rights Commission (ohrc.on.ca)



The image features a bright yellow background with several thick, colorful lines. A red line starts at the top left, goes right, then down. A light purple line starts on the left, goes down, then right, then up, then right, then down. A teal line starts on the left, goes right. A blue line starts on the right, goes down, then left, then up. A red line starts at the bottom right, goes up. The text "PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER" is centered in bold black font.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Steps towards building a great job application

1



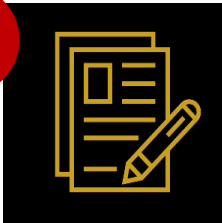
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Key takeaways for your job applications

- Starting point → identify relevant skills, experiences, goals
- Understand the employer perspective
- Analyze job descriptions to assess employer needs
- Draw connections between what employers want; provide evidence you have it
- “Smart” tailor your documents
 - Consider creating a “master resume”, or using the Lego approach for your cover letters
- Show, don’t tell!
 - What + How + Why / Action + Impact / Skill + Evidence
 - S.T.A.R approach

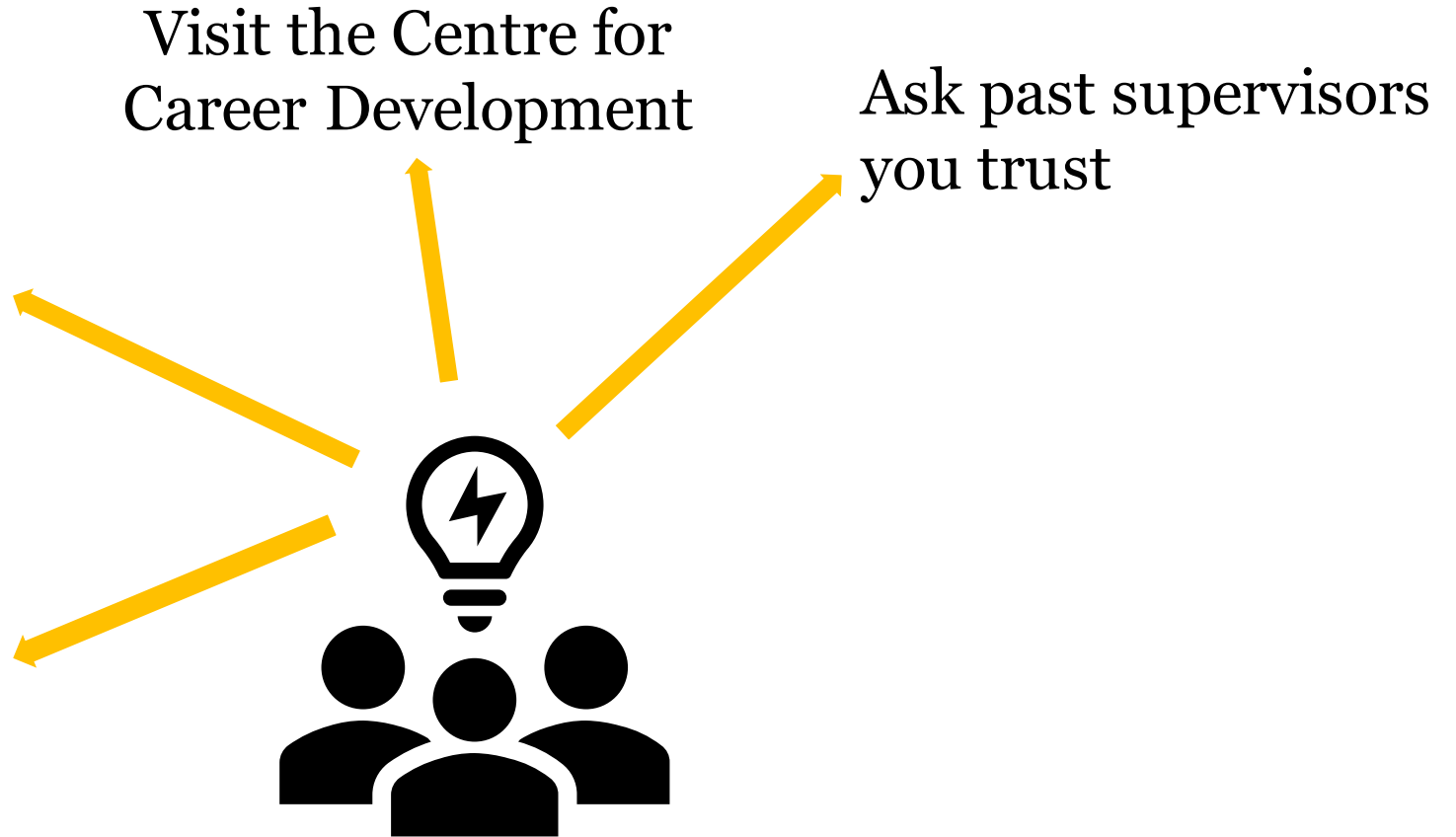




REFINE

Collect feedback from trusted friends, peers, mentors

Check out other people's resumes
(what do you like, what do you not like)



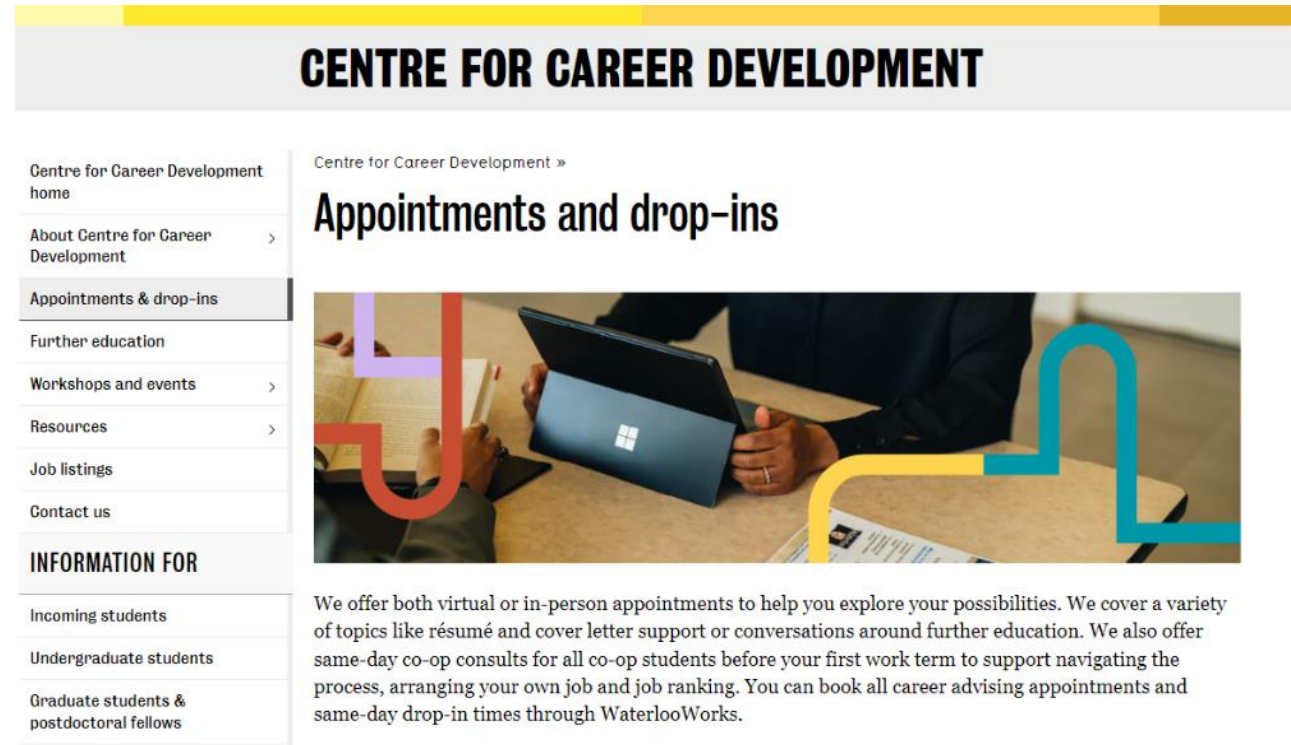
Visit the Centre for Career Development

Ask past supervisors you trust



Additional Support

- Visit the Centre for Career Development (virtually or in-person) for one-on-one support with your job search and application documents, including **resumes & cover letters**
- Same day 20-minute drop-ins
- 30-minute appointments
- <https://uwaterloo.ca/career-action/one-one-supports>



The screenshot shows the website for the Centre for Career Development. At the top, there is a yellow header with the text "CENTRE FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT". Below this is a navigation menu with the following items: "Centre for Career Development home", "About Centre for Career Development", "Appointments & drop-ins" (highlighted), "Further education", "Workshops and events", "Resources", "Job listings", and "Contact us". Below the menu is a section titled "INFORMATION FOR" with sub-sections for "Incoming students", "Undergraduate students", and "Graduate students & postdoctoral fellows". The main content area features a heading "Appointments and drop-ins" and a photograph of two people sitting at a table, one using a laptop. Below the photo, there is a paragraph of text: "We offer both virtual or in-person appointments to help you explore your possibilities. We cover a variety of topics like résumé and cover letter support or conversations around further education. We also offer same-day co-op consults for all co-op students before your first work term to support navigating the process, arranging your own job and job ranking. You can book all career advising appointments and same-day drop-in times through WaterlooWorks."



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YOU+WATERLOO

Our greatest impact happens together.