

Resume Tips: Thinking Like an Employer

02/10/2025

Anupama Aery
Career Advisor, Centre for Career Development



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development



Photo credit: @bruce.digital

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

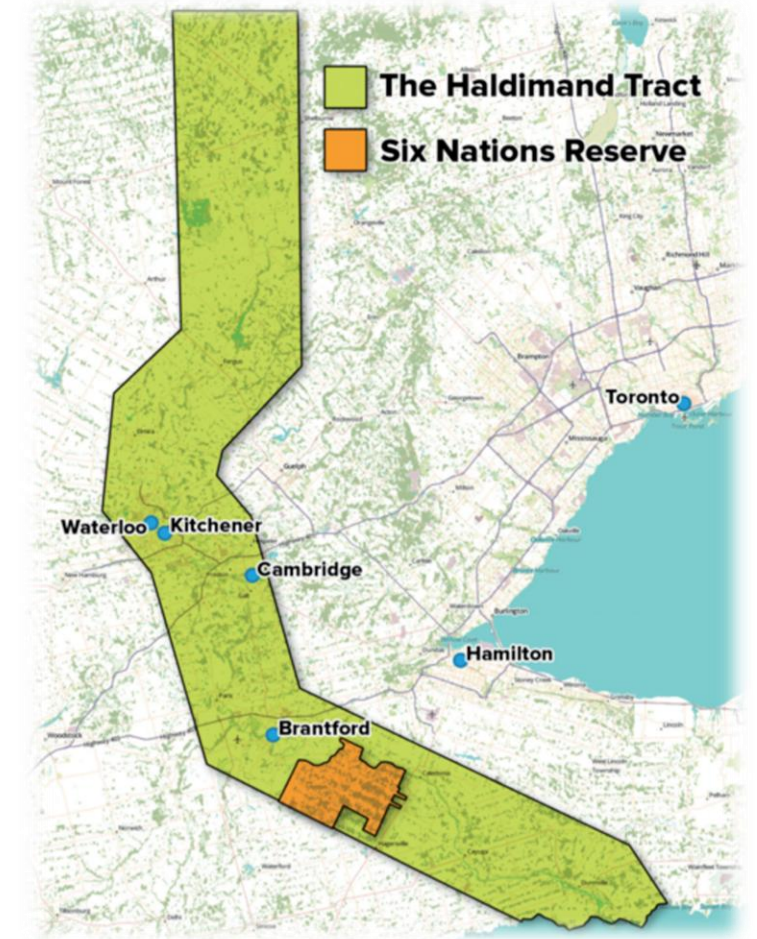
Reports: [TRC Calls to Action](#), [National Inquiry into MMIWG](#)

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](#)

Learning opportunity:

INDG 201 The Indigenous Experience in Canada



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Today's Roadmap

- Identify and articulate your skills and experience
- Understand what an employer is looking for from a job posting
- Learn ways to connect your skills to what the employer is looking for
- Present & market this information in your resume



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**



Photo by Dennis Leinarts from Pexels



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Housekeeping: **co-creating** a safe(r) space

- Participate in the way that feels most comfortable for you!
- Please use the chat or raise your virtual hand to ask questions during presentation time.
 - Feel free to send me a direct message if you have a question or comment you would like to share anonymously
- Ask questions whenever! We'll also dedicate time at the end for Q&A
- If having tech issues, we'll do our best to troubleshoot
- **Take what works for you, leave what doesn't.**





LET'S START HERE: DISCUSSION

What are common questions/concerns you might have about resumes?

STEPS TOWARDS BUILDING A GREAT RESUME

1



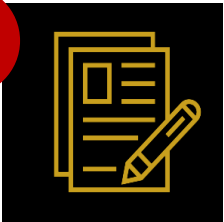
IDENTIFY your skills, interests, experience, values and work search goals.

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.



STEPS BUILDING A GREAT RESUME



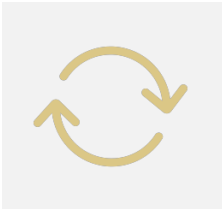
IDENTIFY your skills, interests, experience, values and work search goals.



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.



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 to 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”

SKILLS

- C/C++, Python, Java
- Accounting skills
- Time management
- Quickbooks

Summary of Qualifications/Skills

Summary: “Time management”

The Skills list offers no explanation of how the time management skills were developed. Will the remainder of the resume/cover letter provide more evidence? Sometimes a hiring manager may not read on to find out.



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?

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



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

THE IMPORTANCE OF SKILL TRANSLATION

“If we take the degree as a job, then we need to learn how to articulate our time in the degree as time spent *working at a job.*”

Erin Wunker, “Articulating Academic Work Experience in a Non-Academic World,” *Hook & Eye*



Translating Academic Skills

University Language	Resume Language
Look at/study/examine x	Evaluate/analyze x
Hold office hours	Communicate complex information to non-expert audiences
Run tutorials	Facilitate/lead group meetings
Defend thesis	Led discussion on research findings and methodology with experts in field
Give presentation	Presented research findings interactively (to experts in the field)
Do research	...



Translating Research and Teaching Experience

Defended my thesis

vs.

Presented research results and justified my methodological approaches through engaging in a discussion with experts in the field

Conducted successful tutorial sessions

vs.

Facilitated engaging group discussions by ensuring group members felt heard and their opinions were valued



Resume Basics

The purpose of a resume is to:

- Communicate your competencies (skills, knowledge, abilities) and experiences in a structured format
- Land an interview!

Typically, resumes are...

- Used for employment/volunteer opportunities
- 1-2 pages in length
- Tailored to a specific field or job



Photo by chenspec from Pixabay

What are employers looking for?

What are employers looking for?

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

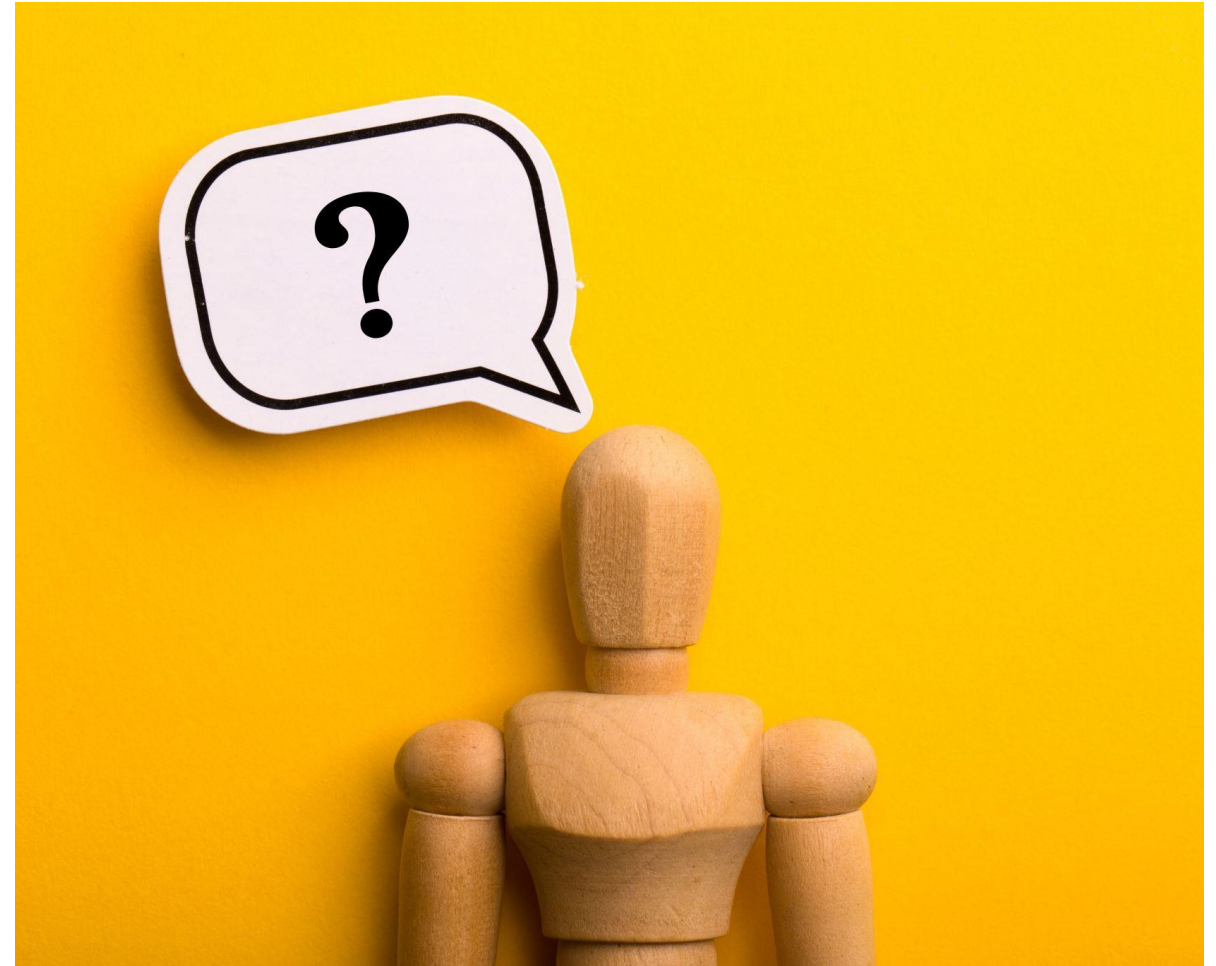
What problems do they notice?

- 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

What are some key words we can identify in this job description?

JOB DESCRIPTION BREAKDOWN

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 accountingsystem
- 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.



Steps towards building a great job application



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.



Two aspects of a resume

Style

- Appearance, layout, formatting choices, pictures icons, graphics

Content

- Structure, sections, bullet points, summary of experience, skills, knowledge, etc.



What to include on a resume?

- Background, experience, knowledge, skills, languages
- Job/career objectives
- Accomplishments, awards, certificates
- Interests, passions, hobbies
- Personality

What does “relevant” content mean on a resume?



Sections of a Resume

Contact Information

**Summary of
Qualifications**

Education

Work Experience

Volunteer Experience

Projects

**Awards and
Certificates**

**Activities and
Interests**

Other sections: objective statement, technical skills, languages, relevant courses, publications, references



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

Resume Styles

- **(Reverse) Chronological Resume**
 - Organizing experiences in reverse chronological order, from present to past
- **Modified Chronological Resume**
 - Prioritize work experience by relevance rather than date
- **Functional Resume**
 - Grouping/organizing experiences under skill headings



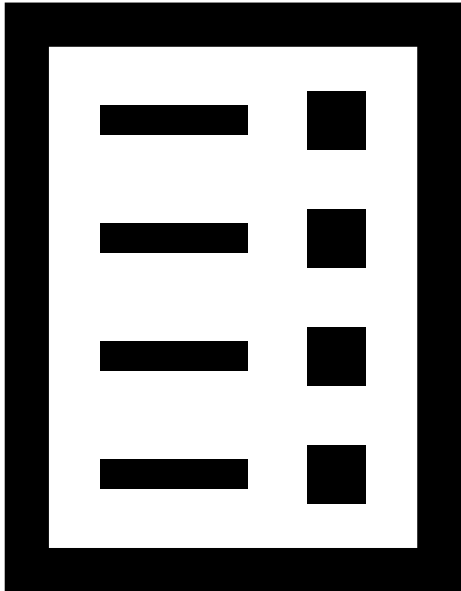
Summary of Qualifications

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.
- Strengthen bullet points by referencing where or how you developed the above skill



Writing Bullet Points



A few strategies:

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

A few tools:

- Action verbs
- Quantification
- Bolding/emphasis



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

Examples:

- Designed client database using MS Access, doubling the speed of information retrieval
- Delivered engaging tutorials as a peer tutor to groups of 30 first-year physics students



SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS 1

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Current First-aid and CPR certification.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.
- Familiar with Microsoft Office Suite.
- Fluent in French.
- 2 years of office work experience.
- Enthusiastic individual with an academic background in accounting and finance.

VS



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

JOB DESCRIPTION BREAKDOWN - KEYWORDS

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 accountingsystem
- 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

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS 2

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- Current First-aid and CPR certification.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.
- Familiar with Microsoft Office Suite.
- Fluent in French.
- 2 years of office work experience.
- Enthusiastic individual with an academic background in accounting and finance.

VS

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

- 2 years work experience in fast-paced office environment
- Enthusiastic individual with diverse academic background in accounting and finance
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills strengthened through various volunteer positions
- Proficient user of Microsoft Office Suite; 4+ years experience working with Excel
- Fluent in French



Quote: THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

“Imagine a doctor's résumé... do you want the doctor's résumé to say, “**has worked with patients**” or “**familiarity with medical practices**” or do you want her to say “**successfully performed 20 surgeries**” and leave all that other stuff off? [Use] the highest value points and leave the other stuff to be implied.”

Director of Product Management, Primal

DESCRIBING YOUR SKILLS / EXPERIENCE



Sales Associate, Campus Bookstore | Ottawa, ON

- Helped customers at the store cash register.
- Used Microsoft Excel to enter data.
- Answered questions and provided customer service.

VS

DESCRIBING YOUR SKILLS / EXPERIENCE 1



VS

Sales Associate, Campus Bookstore | Ottawa, ON

- Helped customers at the store cash register.
- Used Microsoft Excel to enter data.
- Answered questions and provided customer service.

Sales Associate, Campus Bookstore | Ottawa, ON

- Communicated **effectively with customers in-person, over email, and on the phone to ensure satisfaction when responding to inquiries.**
- Improved inventory management and tracking by creating data storage spreadsheets using Excel.
- Commended on 2 occasions for outstanding problem-solving and customer service by the store manager.

strong action verb + **what** + **how** + **why** + **highlighting a skill**



DESCRIBING YOUR SKILLS / EXPERIENCE 2



VS

Communications Coordinator, University of Waterloo | Waterloo, ON

- Managed social media accounts.
- Drafted and sent out bi-weekly email newsletter.
- Assisted in office management tasks as needed.

DESCRIBING YOUR SKILLS / EXPERIENCE 3



VS

Communications Coordinator, University of Waterloo | Waterloo, ON

- Managed social media accounts.
- Drafted and sent out bi-weekly email newsletter.
- Assisted in office management tasks as needed.

Communications Coordinator, University of Waterloo | Waterloo, ON

- Managed a Twitter and Instagram account with over 15,000 combined followers; designed, coordinated, and scheduled social media content using Canva and Hootsuite.
- Collected weekly department updates from 4 different teams and curated a bi-weekly email newsletter to maintain faculty-wide communications.
- Supported office manager in coordinating room bookings, tracking office inventory, and handling incoming and outgoing mail.

A Brief Summary

- 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
- Prioritize sections of your resume based on relevance
- Be specific about skills and accomplishments in your bullet points



WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

These workshops are for you! We are always looking for ways to improve. Please complete the feedback survey delivered to your inbox



What if your resume is being run through an ATS?

ATS = Applicant Tracking System



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

Centre for Career
Development

More Tips

- Consider creating a “main resume”
 - A main resume contains ALL of your experiences and/or different versions of the same bullet point for a specific experience or skill
- Consider creating multiple versions of your resume tailored towards different job types/industries



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.



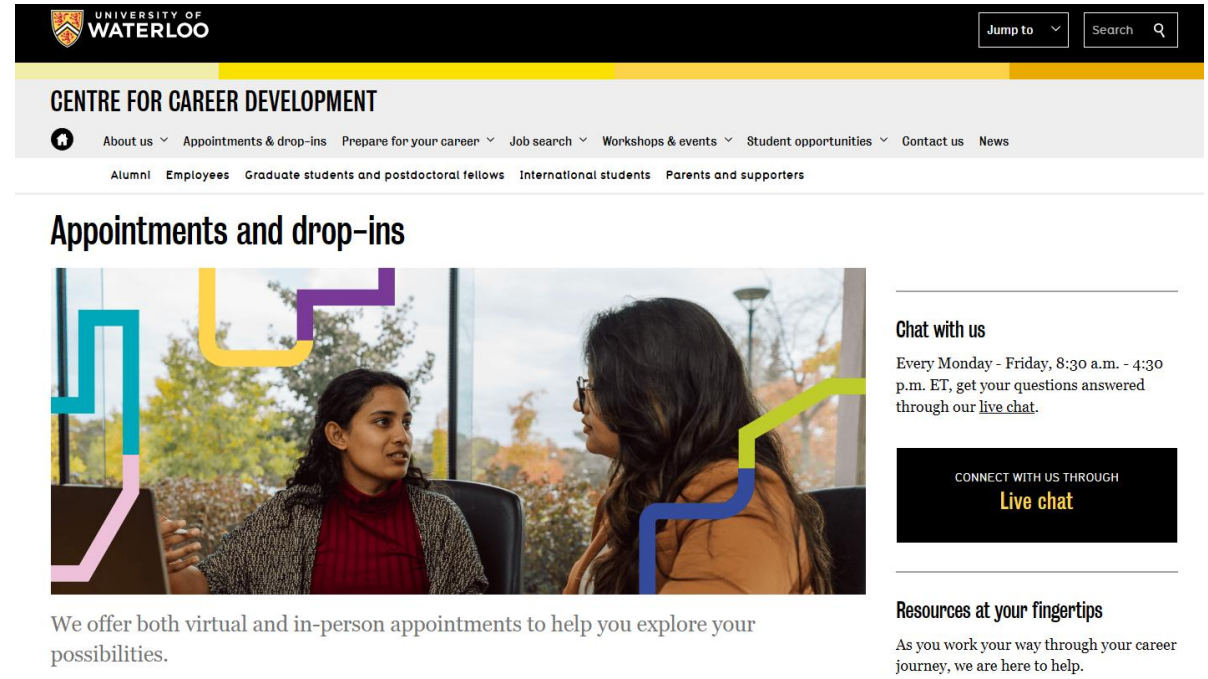


REFINE



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-development/appointments-drop-ins>



The screenshot shows the website for the Centre for Career Development at the University of Waterloo. The header includes the university logo and navigation links. The main content area is titled 'Appointments and drop-ins' and features a photograph of two women in a meeting. To the right of the photo is a 'Chat with us' section with a 'Live chat' button. Below the photo is a paragraph of text, and to the right is a 'Resources at your fingertips' section.


UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

CENTRE FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

About us | Appointments & drop-ins | Prepare for your career | Job search | Workshops & events | Student opportunities | Contact us | News

Alumni | Employees | Graduate students and postdoctoral fellows | International students | Parents and supporters

Appointments and drop-ins



Chat with us
Every Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. ET, get your questions answered through our [live chat](#).

CONNECT WITH US THROUGH
Live chat

Resources at your fingertips
As you work your way through your career journey, we are here to help.

We offer both virtual and in-person appointments to help you explore your possibilities.

**UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO**



**Centre for Career
Development**