



At a Glance: Articulate and communicate strengths, knowledge, and experience persuasively to potential employers. Demonstrate the transferability of your skills and knowledge to diverse employers. Adapt communication style and terminology for specific organizations to demonstrate fit.

Understanding Applying & Interviewing

Once you have found a position you are interested in, you will need to prepare your application materials. These materials will vary depending on the industry and specifics of the position you are applying to, but will typically consist of at least a CV and a cover letter. Your CV is a quick overview of your experience, background, and skills which helps a potential employer decide if you are a good candidate to invite for an interview.¹ Your cover letter is about fit: highlighting the reasons why you are a good candidate for this particular position, and identifying the match you see between your skills and the employer's needs.² If your application materials are successful, you may be invited in for a job interview where the employer will assess your suitability for the position. The interview is also an opportunity for you to assess whether the position is a good fit for you.

Why does it matter?

Managers and HR professionals look at hundreds of applications during the hiring process and thousands of applications throughout the duration of their career. Consequently, they are able to tell very quickly if a candidate has tailored their application materials to the unique qualifications of a position. Consider that your application materials are the first impression you will make to an employer who is contemplating investing in you for the next 3-5 years. Making an effort to articulate your skills and experience in a way that is explicit and specific to the details of a position shows an employer that you are worth investing in. Taking the time and care to submit high-quality, custom materials at the beginning of your application process will also help you to articulate who you are and what you have to offer in preparation for a potential job interview.

Cultivating Applying & Interviewing

Writing Your CV

CV formatting is an art in itself, with different requirements for various jobs and industries. However, there are some key factors to keep in mind while preparing any CV. Firstly, keep things short and concise. Your CV is generally a 1-2 page document that provides a potential employer with a quick “at a glance” summary of the skills you possess relevant to the position you are applying for. Use action verbs to describe your activities and experiences in 4-6 bullet points per experience, and be sure to include any relevant accomplishments, volunteer experience, or community service.

Secondly, tailor the information included in your CV to each individual job application. To make customizing your CV easier, consider compiling a “master CV” that includes all of your past activities, experiences, and accomplishments. This comprehensive record of your skills and experience is something which you can periodically update and refer to for future job applications.³

Lastly, make sure that the most relevant information is towards the beginning of your CV and if you are using an old CV template, check that all of your contact information is up-to-date. For more CV writing tips, see the quick guide below or consult the CaPS [How to Write a CV](#) Guide.

Writing Your Cover Letter

If your CV is an outline of your experience and qualifications, your cover letter should bring them to life!⁴ Before you sit down to write your cover letter, ask yourself what you would like the employer to know about you, why you want this job, and why you think they should hire you.⁵ Then, focus on integrating these key points in your cover letter.

Your cover letter is a one page document consisting of 3-4 paragraphs. Your first paragraph provides a catchy picture of who you are and what you want, linking yourself directly to the needs and interests of the employer in 1-2 phrases. Your second and third paragraphs explain why you are the perfect candidate for this position using specific examples from the skills and experience summarized in your CV. Your final paragraph expresses why you want to work for this employer and how your interests and values align with their mission, goals, services, and/or products. Finally, conclude your letter by thanking the reader for their time and consideration.⁶ For more cover letter writing tips, check out the quick guide below or consult the CaPS [How to Write a Cover Letter](#) Guide.

The Interview

If an employer is impressed with you on paper, they may invite you to an interview to further assess your qualifications, experience, personality, motivation, communication, and interpersonal skills.⁷ An interview is also a great opportunity for you to gauge if the job or organization you are applying to meshes with your values, interests, and skills.⁸ While every job interview will be slightly different, the kind of questions you will be asked will generally fall into one of four categories: broad questions to help get the conversation started, questions about your skills and ability to do the job, questions about your fit with the team and/or work culture, and questions about your motivation and desire to fill this position. Some interview contexts will also include case questions which are designed for you to showcase your problem solving skills in action.⁹ Keep these categories in mind while preparing yourself for an interview and brainstorm ways you can incorporate specific examples into your responses. For more tips on interviewing, check out the quick guide below or consult the CaPS [How to Interview](#) Guide.

An additional consideration for the 21st century job seeker is the ways in which technology is becoming incorporated into the application and interviewing process. Many employers now use software programs to screen their CVs, hold interviews via skype, or even google potential candidates prior to their interview. Social media platforms, in particular, are becoming increasingly important when looking for work¹⁰ and professional profiles such as LinkedIn have become an essential part of any job search, equal to having a CV and cover letter prepared. In fact, in the world of recruitment, LinkedIn is now recognized as the single best online platform for employers to find candidates.¹¹ Check out the CaPS [LinkedIn Profile Guide](#) for more information about how to leverage your LinkedIn profile for the contemporary job market, and incorporate some time in your application process to ensure that your digital presence is representative of the person you want employers to see.

Quick Guide to CV Writing

- **Find your style:** instead of forcing your content into a particular template, try to find a format and style that highlights your experience and strengths. The order and emphasis of your sections should also reflect the level of priority of your reader.
- **Look through their eyes:** put yourself in the shoes of your reader - can they easily find the information they are looking for? Is it clear why you would be a good fit for the job?
- **Use concrete examples:** what exactly did you do or accomplish? Describe your experience.
- **Be clear and consistent:** ensure your content is professionally presented with coherent style and formatting relevant to the position/company/field you are applying to.
- **Do your research:** demonstrate knowledge of the employer and what they are looking for. Be intentional and informed to set yourself apart from other applicants.
- **Know your length:** in Canada, outside of academia, your CV can be up to two pages. There are a few exceptions, including the management/business sector, which tends to prefer one page. Ask CaPS if you are unsure about norms for your particular field/geographic area.

Quick Guide to Cover Letter Writing

- **Keep it simple:** limit your letter to one page that highlights the key elements of your application.
- **Customize:** avoid writing one generic cover letter for use in all your applications. Employers can tell. Tailor your letter to each position, employer, or industry.
- **Express yourself:** aim for a confident, factual tone. Highlight your achievements and experience using specific examples and don't be afraid of sounding excited about the opportunity.
- **Write to a real person:** if it is not clear who to address your letter to, contact the receptionist or HR department to see if they can provide you with the name of the appropriate person. If this information is not available, start your letter with a salutation such as "Dear Sir or Madam," "Dear Hiring Committee," or "To Human Resources."
- **Proofread, proofread, proofread:** nothing says carelessness a typo in your cover letter. Ask a friend or colleague to take a quick look at your application materials before you submit them.

Quick Guide to Job Interviews

- **Know yourself:** consider what you would like the interviewers to know about you and how you want to convey this information verbally. Think of specific examples which highlight your skills, qualifications, and achievements, and demonstrate the match between your skillset and the employer's needs.
- **Know the employer:** brush up on your knowledge of the employer before your interview to demonstrate your enthusiasm, commitment, and professionalism. Research on the industry, employer and position can also help you anticipate the type of questions you may be asked during your interview.
- **Plan ahead:** (re)connect with your references before your interview to let them know which positions you are interviewing for and that they may be contacted in the near future. Anticipate the kinds of questions you may be asked based on this employer's needs, and think about how you will answer them. Also, take some time to prepare which questions you would like to ask the employer.
- **Practice:** practicing will help you feel more poised and confident, and ensure that you are communicating clearly. Ask a friend to run through sample questions with you; [book a mock interview](#) with a Career Advisor at CaPS.
- **Aim for a positive first impression:** on the day of the interview arrive 10-15min early with extra copies of your CV, references, and portfolio (if applicable). Dress as the most polished and professional version of yourself possible, taking into account industry and location norms. Be respectful and friendly to everyone you meet.
- **Follow-up:** send a thank you note within 24hrs of the interview - thank the interviewers for their time, mention anything you found particularly interesting, indicate your continued interest in the position. Follow up with the interviewers and inquire about the status of your application if you have not heard from them within the agreed time frame.

Taking Action

Professional Development & Training

- Check [myInvolvement](#) for upcoming workshops and programs by searching for events tagged with this category: applying & Interviewing

Gaining Experience

- Create your account with [InterviewStream](#) to practice interviewing.
- Participate in [career fairs](#) and talk with diverse employers.
- Schedule a mock interview @ [CaPSResources](#)

Resources

Websites

- [McGill Career Planning Service - Job Search Skills](#): This site offers job skill information - CV, cover letter, networking, salary negotiation and more.

Books & Articles

- Baur, J. (2013). *The essential job interview handbook: A quick and handy resource for every job seeker*. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/861510662>
- Bolles, R. N. (2013). *What color is your parachute?: A practical manual for job-hunters and career-changers*. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/856523364>
- DeLuca, M. J., & DeLuca, N. F. (2001). *More best answers to the 201 most frequently asked interview questions*. New York: McGraw-Hill. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/47694798>
- Kennedy, J. L. (2012). *Job interviews for dummies*. Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <http://mcgill.worldcat.org/oclc/774290324>

Need Help?

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References

- ¹ [How to Write a CV. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ² [How to Write a Cover Letter. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ³ [How to Write a CV. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ⁴ [How to Write a Cover Letter. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ⁵ [How to Write a Cover Letter. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ⁶ [How to Write a Cover Letter. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ⁷ [How to Interview. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ⁸ [How to Interview. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ⁹ [How to Interview. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ¹⁰ [LinkedIn Profile Guide. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)
- ¹¹ [LinkedIn Profile Guide. Bottomer, J. & McClintok, J. \(2018\).](#)