

So you want to ask someone to register you as an Apprentice...

Do you want a résumé that makes you look different and more prepared than other candidates, even if you don't have a lot of specific or related experience?

A. Find out what the trade is like.

1. *Find out the skills that are necessary for that trade.* What is that trade about? What level of detail? What are the things you would have to use in that trade (blueprints, codes, size and type of tools, size and type of machinery)?
2. *Find out the area and type of setting in which that work is done.* Shop setting or customers' houses? Noisy or quiet? Do people multi-task?
3. *Find out the usual schedule for work:* People in that position may work days, nights, 9 to 5, early mornings, evenings or weekends.
4. *Daily transportation needed:* Do you need to provide your own transportation? Is the work site and schedule good for using public transit or do you need to have your own form of transportation?

B. Look at your own experience. What things do you do in your life that demonstrate these types of skills either at home, at work or in the community? Look for things you can show an employer or talk about in an interview. Let the employer see the similarity between the things you do and the types of skills needed for that trade.

C. Write an organized résumé that shows how the skills needed and the skills and abilities you have are linked. Most people write a basic framework for a résumé first that just includes the facts: names, dates and titles. Then they go back and add achievements and objectives when they can think more creatively about what is similar.

Don't forget about hobbies as a way to show your skills. Volunteer work shows that you can work according to someone else's standards, not just your own. Acquiring skills can show an employer how you strive to do things well and excel.

Look to see how in the following résumé school, work and volunteer experience was used to show the employer that she has the skills and attention to detail and safety that is required for this trade even though she has never actually worked in this trade before. All the things that can be tied in, that were similar (see step B), were emphasized as achievements in her résumé.



Tell a story with your résumé. Say what your strengths were in each job, work placement or volunteer experience. Put in numbers to show how busy you were, or how much work you did. These are things

that help an employer see in his/her own imagination what you might be like at the workplace. This is much better than just being a name and a set of dates and titles.

For people who still doubt the need to have a different résumé and cover letter for each employer, think about it from the employer's point of view:

- They see their business as distinct, run their way and with their priorities and clientele.
- There are differences in the industry: some companies take pride on their use of new materials, their customer services, or emphasize certain parts of the industry they specialize in.

An applicant who sends a résumé that was photocopied and sent to each employer with no consideration of what they do, their main clientele or area of expertise is not using ways of setting their application apart from all the others. Finding out this information means you are actually interested in *their* job and *their* company, not just any job that happens to be out there.

How do you find out this information? The Informational Interview

People who work for the company can be a good source of information. It is important to NOT ask for a job during the informational interview. The purpose is to find out if you want a job with this company and industry, if you will be doing what you thought and if the schedule suits what you need. After you consider what you have been told and it matches what you want, then apply.

Use the information you have received in your letter to show you actually took in the information and have decided that the company, the industry and any other factors are what you have chosen. Compare that letter to someone who is applying to any company, for no particular reason whatsoever. Which letter and résumé would be considered more seriously if you both had the same kind of experience?

The other benefit of doing the informational interview is having the name of someone in the company who actually knows who you are. If you are someone without any connections, this is a way of creating one.

Ivana Career

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Objective

To enter the Instrument and Control Technician Trade as a Youth Apprentice with ABC Mechanical

Key Skills

Manual dexterity

Attention to details and accuracy

Clear writing ability

Organized work habits; attention to safety concerns and safe work practices

Work well in busy environments

Education

Halifax County District High School

Halifax, Nova Scotia

2009 to present (Currently Grade 11)

Achievements:

- I excel at math and science, and participate in Technology and Trade courses (both grades 10 and 11).
- Average mark is 85% over all subjects with 90% in Building Trades 10 last year
- Produced a project to specifications that was suitable for the next phase of the building trades project

Work History

Shop Assistant

Beautiful Furniture Carpentry

Halifax, Nova Scotia

2011 Co-op Work Term (200 hours)

Achievements

- Learned basics of shop safety, PPE use, reading plans for details, equipment use and estimating costs of materials and labour.
- Tasks done unsupervised: finishing surfaces, organizing tools, verifying measurements before cuts and customer service.

Food Service Food Preparer and Cashier

Local Fast Food Restaurant

2009 to present (part time)

Achievements

- Started as cold food preparation and was cross trained in hot food preparation and customer service.
- Monitored temperatures of meat and vegetables.
- Produced food with consistent quality according to serving size and cooking instructions
- Served up to 30 customers accurately every hour for a 7 hour shift.

Child Care

Various families (occasional)

2008 to present

- Provided careful attention to children from the ages of 9 months to 8 years old.
- This includes a family with 3 children and 1 dog.
- Prepared some meals and provided homework help to school age children.

Hobbies and Interests

Meeting assistant and general volunteer

Local Food Bank

2007 to 2009

- Greeted people, took attendance at meetings
- Sorted food according to food categories
- Looked for flaws in packaging that show the food is potentially unsafe to eat.

Musician

2005 to present

- Acoustic Guitar (Intermediate level): lessons and self-taught
- Performed for local groups of children and daycares.

References available upon request

So now we know a lot about Ms. Career.

She works well with customers, is known for accurate and safe work, has been able to be trained in various positions at work, and has done well in busy situations where lots of things were going on at the same time. She has been involved in the community and has worked to meet other people's expectations both in volunteer and paid settings.

Employers reading this résumé can get a picture in their head of her at work. A résumé where she took the time to isolate the skills that are valid for this industry is easy for an employer to read and look for these skills. She has done the hard work of sifting through all the unnecessary things for the employer and she also is declaring herself as someone with skills in a confident way.

All the things written in "key skills" were emphasized throughout the résumé. She claimed to have a skill and then proved it in her jobs and hobbies. She gave the employer ideas about questions to ask her references. She took control of the impression she wanted to give the employer.

Other notes about résumés in general:

- Your email address: make it a simple name, not a goofy or potentially offensive email identity. Try to avoid the _ sign if you can because it can be overlooked when the email address is underlined automatically by some programs. Example: name_name@email.com
- Take the time to spell things out: Nova Scotia rather than NS, the whole company name and other words frequently shortened. It looks like you took more time and care to do this résumé correctly.
- When you choose a format, keep it consistent. For example, if you make a job title **bold**, make all job titles **bold**.

Remember that you are asking to be taken seriously for a job and potentially a career that is dependent on your attention to detail and accuracy. Start showing that attention now. Be prepared to spend a few hours at least on the résumé and get someone else to look at to see the mistakes you can't see. Make sure they look for unfinished details or inconsistent formatting as well as words not spelled correctly.

The Cover Letter



Now that she has a good résumé, she needs a good letter to show why she has an interest in the trade and to tell a bit of her story about why she feels she is well prepared to be an Instrument and Control Technician. A cover letter completes the package started with a good résumé. It gives the employer a sense of who you are as a person, so that you are less of a stranger.

Why write a letter? Why **not** write a cover letter? She doesn't come across someone willing to sign on an apprentice, and potentially a youth apprentice, every day. She needs to use the opportunity as best she can, or she may have to convince an employer to take her on knowing she will need to have the training and supervision of a certified person while she is at the workplace. This is commitment to training. Does your letter and résumé show you are as committed as the employer?

Cover letters are particularly useful when you are sending a résumé to a company who has not yet advertised that they are registering. With 'cold' letters you need to work harder to get them to pay attention to your information and doing your own homework about that company and what they do is very important. In those cases this is a letter of introduction that may be kept on file for some time if you are successful in catching their attention; they may keep you in mind for the next opening. It is also an opportunity to open up communications with that company or employer for future opportunities that may be related.

There is no one letter style that works. What works for you depends on how you like to express yourself and your story about how you became interested in the trade. A good cover letter for Ms. Career might:

- explain how she became aware of this career option and what she did to research it.
- summarize some of the main points of the résumé
- point out what she was known for in her jobs and volunteer roles that is important in the trade.

For example, she might talk about what she learned in her courses and how she used specifications to accurately build her project.

Here is a basic format that you can follow:

Your name
Your address
City, province, postal code
Phone number
Email address if you are providing it.

Date

Name of business owner / employer
Title (if appropriate and known)
Name of company
Address
City, province, postal code
Email address if you are sending this by email

To (name of employer / business owner)

First paragraph: Introduce yourself as if you had only 30 seconds to meet this person to get them interested in talking to you. Tell him/her your goal in applying to them, and a summary of the skills you have to offer their trade and their company. *Many people leave this to the last to write because it is a summary. If you have difficulty writing this, do the second and third paragraph first and see what you end up saying and how you want to introduce it.*

Second paragraph: How did you become aware of the trade and the skills it needs? Did you talk to anyone in the trade? Did you have any opportunities to see the trade at work? Tell the employer how you know what you claim to know about the trade. Tell the employer what you like about their company and why you have chosen to write to them.

Third paragraph: You know the skills needed in the trade. Now prove you have them or have the potential to learn them. This is where telling about a particular example that you might have mentioned in your résumé and how you learned or showed those skills will be useful.

Fourth paragraph: Restating your point and saying goodbye in a way that invites them to contact you about their opportunity. An example could be “I look forward to talking to you about this opportunity. If you have any questions or wish to contact me for an interview, you can reach me at (phone number) or the email address above.” *If you offer to contact them again on your own, remember when you promised to do it. They might be waiting for your call or email to see if you follow through on your promises.*

Yours Sincerely,
(2 to 3 lines to have space to sign)
Your name (typed)

Formal or Informal? How personal can I make this letter?

Your cover letter can be very formal or can be informal. It really depends on the type of company and your relationship to the person who is doing the registering. If you know that person well, you might be able to be less formal. “Less formal” does not mean less information, however. It just means that more time is spent sounding professional when you are submitting your application package to people who do not know you or who demand professionalism.

If the applications are screened through a HR department such as in a large company, remember it is the HR department that sees the letters first. They sift out who is a serious candidate and look for résumés that mention the skills and qualifications they want to see. They don’t know you personally and your informal letter may not go over well. The registering manager may not see other letters not screened through at all, and he/she **cannot register** (hire) someone who did not get past the first screen even if they know you applied.

Trying hard to get a job is worth it – even if you don’t get the job.

This information about résumés and cover letters is valid for any career opportunity. Searching out information about the job, thinking about you would fit into the role and then communicating those common links is crucial to any successful job search.

It is particularly important when the employer is going to take some considerable resources to train you and sign up to ongoing training agreement that can last years. If you can’t dedicate some time to a real application now, why would they take you on and dedicate time to you later?

Besides, being told you don’t have enough experience for a job right now is not the end of the road. An employer impressed with your efforts may not have a job for you today but may be open to talking to you about other people or companies who may have opportunities for you. Look at any job application as a way to get to know people in the field. Some of them may be great resources to other places that can register you or they may be ready to register you when you apply in the future.

So be ready for rejection, and be prepared to learn something from the employer about how to be more prepared next time. Ask what experience you might need to be successful. If you were lucky enough to get as far as an interview, ask for some feedback on your interview.

Asking for feedback on the interview can be hard, because it’s difficult to take constructive criticism well. If you need some time to digest not getting the job before you have this conversation, ask to talk to the interviewer in a few days, when you will have had some time to deal with your disappointment. If a delay is not possible, be very aware if you are getting defensive and handle your feelings as best you can. Think about how prepared you will be for the next interview if you can learn what you are not communicating well now and improve it.

Final Checklist:

Résumé

- Have you researched the job, the company and the industry enough?
- Did you identify key skills?
- Did you include details in your résumé that proves you have those key skills?
- Did you put information in an order that is logical?
- Is the formatting consistent?
- Was the résumé checked by someone else for mistakes and inconsistencies?

Cover letter

- Is the mailing address correct?
- Is it addressed to the right person? Did you call the company to make sure you had the name(s) spelled correctly? Did you get the right title?
- Are your paragraphs organized?
- Did you sign off professionally?
- Did someone else read the letter to make sure it communicated what you want said?

The package put together

- Is the entire package sent cleanly folded (if it is folded at all) and presentable?
- If you choose to drop it off personally, are you ready to be presented to the manager when you drop it off?
- Will it arrive on time? Look for the time of day as well as the day for the deadline. With email, they know you sent the email after 5:00, for example, and your résumé package may not be accepted if 5:00 was the deadline. If you are dropping it off, the office may be closed after a certain time and there is no way to drop it off.
- Did you confirm that an application was received? This is an excellent opportunity for someone to be able to talk to you, for you to show you have real interest in the job and to ensure that no mistakes happened with your résumé. Emails will show you sent it on time in case you find they did not receive yours (such things do happen sometimes) and you need to show them your résumé should at least be included in the first screening. Another hint: send it with the BCC option to yourself. If it appears in your inbox, it probably appeared in theirs.

The interview

- Arrive on time.
- Bring a copy of your résumé and cover letter in case you need a copy for them or you want to refer to it yourself.
- Take time to know the names of the people interviewing you. You can ask a receptionist beforehand or take the time in the meeting to write down the names.

- Dress appropriately. Do not go to a hands-on job in a formal suit, but don't go in your work clothes either. The best bet is something that reflects the nature of the job but clean, new, and tidy looking.
- You might immediately go on a tour of the site. Are you ready? They'll supply a hard hat and eye protection, but you need to wear clothes that you could safely wear on a factory tour: full length pants, closed toe shoes, or anything else that is necessary for that industry.
- Use the opportunity to restate their questions to make sure you understood the question if you are unsure what they meant. It is better to check your understanding than give a completely inappropriate answer.
- Take a breath before answering and organize what you want to say. , and jot down a few words to remind yourself of what you want to say.
- In answering situation questions, use a formula of a. explaining the context (what the situation was like), b. what actions you took, c. the results of your actions, and finally d. what you learned. That way even if you are answering a question about a situation in which you made a mistake, you have the opportunity to show them you learned something with the experience.
- Follow up with a thank you to all the interviewers by phone or email.

Good luck with the job hunt.