

From Co-op Chores to Paid Jobs: How to transfer your co-op skills into paid employment

What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?

(We're going to make a list; feel free to write your own dream job here)

How Do Job Applications Work

Job applications are different at different types of companies. Small companies often have very different processes than larger ones. In some fields, companies hire recruiters to seek out applicants. If you are applying through a staffing agency, the process is often different than if you apply directly with a company. At this point, most applications are electronic, though every so often, you'll need to fill out a paper application.

Many companies, especially larger ones, use automated computer systems to screen applications. This saves them time, and also (at least supposedly) removes some of the human bias from reading applications. This makes it even more important than ever to use the most up-to-date resume formats and to choose the keywords that the employer is looking for.

The basic process is usually:

- 1) A company posts an ad or hires a recruiter or staffing agency to find people.
- 2) You apply for the job. This often involves either writing a cover letter and sending a resume, or filling out an application form, or both. Sometimes it might involve sending in a sample of your work. Some places will ask for references when you apply.
- 3) Companies narrow down the applicant pool. Sometimes this involves a brief phone or email screening. Frequently there are many more qualified applicants than jobs.
- 4) You may be asked for an interview. Sometimes a first interview is in person and sometimes they are by phone or by video conference. Remember that you get to interview them, as well, and can ask questions to clarify whether this is a job you want. You can also ask them about their timeline for hiring, so that you'll know which of these next steps to expect. And always send a thank you note after an interview.
- 5) There may be a second (or third or fourth) round of interviews.
- 6) Most places will check references before making an offer to you. Sometimes a company will make an offer that is contingent on additional information, such as a background check or salary negotiations.
- 7) You may receive an offer – you often can negotiate the offer, or at least ask for some time to think about it before you make a decision. If you aren't selected, some companies will be courteous and contact you, but others may not.

Definitions

Application: “An application for employment, job application, or application form (often simply called an application) usually includes a form or collection of forms that an individual seeking employment, called an applicant, must fill out as part of the process of informing an employer of the applicant's availability and desire to be employed, and persuading the employer to offer the applicant employment.” (from Wikipedia)

Cover letter: “A cover letter is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience. The letter provides detailed information on why you are qualified for the job you are applying for. Don't simply repeat what's on your resume -- rather, include specific information on why you're a strong match for the employer's job requirements. Think of your cover letter as a sales pitch that will market your credentials and help you get the interview. As such, you want to make sure your cover letter makes the best impression on the person who is reviewing it” (from <https://www.thebalance.com/cover-letters-4073661>)

Resume: “A resume is a one to two page formal document that lists a job applicant's work experience, education and skills. A resume is designed to provide a detailed summary of an applicant's qualifications for a particular job - it is not usually meant to provide a complete picture. A good resume gives the potential employer enough information to believe the applicant is worth interviewing. A one-page cover letter, submitted along with the resume, can provide additional information about the applicant's qualifications.” (from <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/resume.asp>)

Interview: “A job interview is a one-on-one interview consisting of a conversation between a job applicant and a representative of an employer which is conducted to assess whether the applicant should be hired. Interviews are one of the most popularly used devices for employee selection.” (from wikipedia)

References:

“A professional reference is a recommendation from a person who can vouch for your qualifications for a job. A professional reference for an experienced worker is typically a former employer, a colleague, a client, a vendor, a supervisor, or someone else who can recommend you for employment.” (from <https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-a-professional-reference-2062823>)

Case Studies

Imagine you are the employer, and you are trying to decide which of these people to hire - what sways your opinion?

If you were applying for these jobs, what would you do differently in your cover letter or resume? Take a red pen and make your edits.

[this page is available for you to take notes about your own cover letter or resume]

Hands-on Practice

Translate these co-op jobs into resume bullet points, cover letter sentences, or ways you might offer a reference for a fellow co-oper.

Things to think about:

- What tasks were part of the job? Which of these do you want to highlight?
- What kinds of skills are demonstrated by these jobs? For example, responsibility, budgeting, leadership, food safety?

If you are providing a reference for a fellow co-op member:

- Find out which parts of their experience they want you to highlight.
- Be prepared to explain co-op titles or operations.

In your cover letter:

- Draw out the skills that you gained, especially if they aren't obvious. If you did maintenance, it might be clear that you know how to build things; if you were a maintenance coordinator, you might highlight your experience overseeing projects or supervising people, or your decision-making about when to hire an outside worker.
- If you are applying for a job that isn't in the co-op sector, you don't need to explain very much about the co-op. Your goal is to explain your relevant skills and experience.

Co-op job	Title for resume	Bullet point description(s)
Work Holiday Planner	House Maintenance Coordinator; Building Maintenance Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized and led a group of twenty people in annual maintenance of a 70 year old building. • Conducted a needs-assessment of the physical plant, prioritized projects, and procured supplies. • Increase participation by 20% over previous year's event. • Saved an estimated \$6,000 in contractor costs.
Labor Tzar		
House Representative (to the board)		
Membership Director		
Food Buyer		

Co-op job	Title for resume	Bullet point description(s)
Snack Maker		
Conflict Team		
Facilitator		
Cook		
Add your own co-op jobs below		

How To Actually Find a Job

If you are interested in a job in the cooperative sector, a great place to start is by doing an internship through NASCO's Cooperative Internship Network. Internships are posted in the early spring, and are held over the summer. You can get information at <https://www.nasco.coop/internships>. Since you are attending Institute, you'll get notified when it's time to apply.

If you are aren't looking in the cooperative sector, or if you aren't looking for internships, some great places to start are:

Campus career centers – they'll be able to help you wordsmith your resume and cover letters and help you find positions that are relevant to your skills. If you aren't a student, but were at some point, sometimes the campus career center can still be a resource, or there may be an alumni network for posting jobs.

Job Fairs – Job fairs are held in many cities (as well as on many campuses). At a job fair, you get to talk to people from the companies you are applying to. Sometimes you are talking to the person who'd be hiring, but often, you are talking to someone who is focused on outreach. This is a great way to find out more about what the company is actually looking for and to learn about the culture of the company. Sometimes you can apply for positions at a job fair, so bring several copies of your basic resume.

Job Centers – Many cities have job centers that focus on helping people find employment. This is often a good way to find out about local employment options that you may not know about, especially if you are new in town.

The Internet – It wouldn't be a list of how to find a job if we didn't include the internet. There are some job sites that are geared towards people actively looking for jobs, like indeed.com and craigslist (and idealist.org for non-profits). On these sites, companies post their openings, and job seekers find those posts and apply. There are other sites that are more geared towards passive job seekers, like LinkedIn, Facebook, and many web forums. These sites will share ads for jobs with you, even if you don't go looking. Using the right keywords and listing your relevant skills on social media will get you ads for the jobs you are interested in.